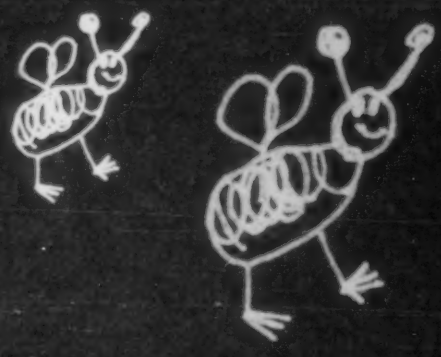
With **Our Best Future** in Mind

Implementing Early Learning in Ontario



Report to the Premier by the
Special Advisor on Early Learning

Charles E. Pascal

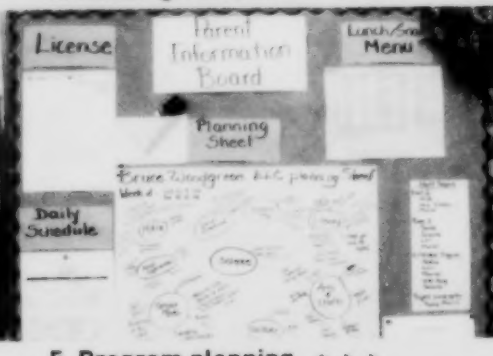
A Full Day of Early Learning

1. The day begins →→→

2. Reading comes first →→→

3. Planning the day →→→

4. Learning activities →→→



5. Program planning →→→

6. Health screening →→→

7. Play-based problem solving →→→

8. Outdoor play →→→

9. The day ends →→→

1. The day begins: Children arrive between 7:30 and 9 a.m. and are greeted by staff in the schoolyard.
2. Inside time begins with reading – either alone or with staff, parents, siblings, or volunteers.
3. Children meet with staff to share a story, plan their day, and discuss current interests.
4. Children choose from various learning centres. Activities are both adult guided and child directed.
5. The school principal is responsible for the program. Early childhood educators, Kindergarten teachers, and supporting staff interact to support children's learning in planned and informal ways. Staff share responsibility for program planning and communication with parents.
6. A community school is always open to parents, siblings, and caregivers. Volunteers enrich programming, and families are linked to family support, health, and intervention programs as required.
7. Play-based problem solving encourages emotional growth and socialization and lays the foundation for skills needed in formal schooling and adult life.
8. Activities are balanced with outdoor play, rest, hygiene, and nutrition.
9. Children may go home at lunch break, after the school day ends, or any time until 6 p.m. After-school programs are available to parents.

Letter of Transmittal

June 2009

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario

Dear Premier:

I am pleased to submit my report, ***With Our Best Future in Mind***, which provides you and your government with a comprehensive plan of action regarding the implementation of your early learning vision. As per your direction, I have situated full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds in the broader context of moving further on Ontario's Best Start goals for a seamless and integrated system to support children from 0 to 12 years old and their families.

Although this report is written in the first person, it represents the ideas and expertise of thousands of people in Ontario and beyond. The plans outlined are informed by the simple practice of catching people and organizations doing the right things well.

I share your view that investing in early learning provides a remarkable return in better outcomes for children and a healthier and more prosperous society for everyone. Ontario has a strong foundation on which to build a comprehensive, integrated child and family service system that will become a model for other jurisdictions.

I want to thank you for the remarkable opportunity to enhance my personal and professional development. I am an enthusiastic lifelong learner, and the experience to date has been an extraordinary journey of learning so much from so many who took the time to share their views and knowledge with me.

I remain ready to assist you and your government in supporting various aspects of implementation. No request is too small. More importantly, practitioners and experts all over the province are ready, willing, and very able to support the changes needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles E. Pascal
Special Advisor on Early Learning

Table of Contents

Chapter 1
An Early Years Vision for Ontario 3

Chapter 2
A Brief Review of the Evidence 9

Chapter 3
Full-Day Learning: Leaving the Patchwork Behind 13

3.1 Leadership for a Child and Family Service System 14

3.2 Programming for Success 24

3.3 Staffing for Success 32

3.4 Program and System Monitoring 37

Chapter 4
Funding Our Best Future 41

Chapter 5
From Words to Action 47

Acknowledging the "We" of Authorship 54

Recommendations 55

Endnotes 58

Chapter 1

An Early Years Vision for Ontario

I am not a wealthy person and I have always had too much work to do. But my children were able to have all-day learning a few years back. It gave my boys a big help to their abilities and confidence. Tell the Premier it is a good thing that everyone in Ontario can have this choice for their children too.

Parent, North Bay

I have been listening for over a year to people like the parent quoted on the previous page. I have learned that there are countless numbers of Ontarians who care about early learning for children and supports for families. They know that experiences in early childhood have lifelong consequences. And they want Ontario to be a leader in ensuring that all our children get the best possible start in life.

So do I. As Special Advisor on Early Learning to Premier Dalton McGuinty, I was asked to recommend:

- how best to implement full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds;
- how to reinvest and redirect resources from this initiative;
- how to build on the success of Ontario's Best Start strategy for a comprehensive, continuous, and integrated system for children from birth to age 12 and their families.

We are all aware that the successful economies and societies of the future will be the best educated and the most innovative. We need our children to be creative thinkers and problem solvers. We need them to be compassionate, engaged, and literate citizens who will thrive in a diverse society. We need them to feel confident to take on the world.

Getting there means having the best education system in the world. We are on our way in Ontario but have work to do when it comes to early learning. The following table shows that Canada consistently scores low on international assessments of early learning and care. While we have some great programs with talented, dedicated people providing them, too often services are disconnected from each other. We leave it to families to bridge the gaps, avoid the overlaps, and negotiate their way, if they can. The current fragmented patchwork of early childhood services too often fails the best interests of our children, frustrates families and educators, and wastes resources.

The result? More than one in four children enter Grade 1 significantly behind their peers.[1] Too many never entirely close the gap and go on to be disruptive in school, fail to graduate, and are unable to fully participate in and contribute to society. Too many end up living lives of misery, harmful to themselves and others. While our schools work hard to help these children catch up, research has shown that it is more difficult and more costly to intervene later than it is to address a child's needs in the early years. And many children who are doing okay in school can do better ... much better.

In imagining an even better future for our remarkable province, it is clear that failure in school, child poverty, youth violence, and the unmet expectations of new Canadians and their children are enemies of prosperity for all of us.

The smartest thing we can do right now – to make a major contribution to Ontario's future – is to ensure that all Ontario children have an even-handed opportunity to succeed in school, become lifelong learners, and pursue their dreams. Our best future depends on it!

Number of Benchmarks for Early Learning and Care Met by Country (UNICEF)[2]

Sweden	10
Iceland	9
Denmark	8
Norway	8
France	8
UK	5
Germany	4
Japan	4
United States	3
Canada	1

Expanding parental leave to 400 days after the birth or adoption of a child will allow more parents to stay home with their babies during the critical period of development when the infant-parent bond is established.

To fully benefit from full-day early learning for 4- and 5-year-olds, we must deal with the chaotic mix of child and family services we currently have in our communities. It would be ineffective and costly to layer a new program on top of a web of unsolved problems. We must turn a jumble of children's programs into a child and family service system that closes the gaps and offers a continuum of services for children from birth to age 12.

It is so important to get it right from the start of life and through the school years. Children are remarkably similar at birth, but by age 4 the gaps are already dramatic. We risk undermining the benefits of our investments in full-day learning if we do not address the needs of our very youngest learners and their parents. And if we do not build on the gains made in the 4-to-5 age group when children enter the primary grades of school, those gains will probably be diminished.

Our best future is one in which all children are:

- healthy and secure;
- emotionally and socially competent;
- eager, confident, and successful learners;
- respectful of the diversity of their peers.

The system I am proposing would create the conditions to enable significant progress towards this universal image of our children ... a future in which every child has every opportunity:

- Every child in Ontario who turns 4 by December 31 would be entitled to attend two years of a full-day, school-year Early Learning Program, operated by school boards.
- Parents would have the option of extended programming before and after the traditional school day and year, not as an add-on, but as part of the Early Learning Program.
- Extended programming for primary school children aged 6 to 8 and after-school programming (e.g., sports, arts, communications) for children aged 9 to 12 would be offered by school boards at the request of 15 or more families in a school.
- Parent fees would be charged only for extended day/year programming.
- Programs for children and their families, which are now spread among multiple providers under a variety of auspices, would be integrated into Best Start Child and Family Centres, under a single municipal system manager. The centres would provide:
  - flexible, part-time and full-day/full-year early learning/care options for children up to 4 years of age;
  - prenatal and postnatal information and supports;
  - parenting and family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and playgroups;
  - nutrition and nutrition counselling;
  - early identification and intervention resources;
  - links to special needs treatment and community resources, including libraries, recreation and community centres, health care, family counselling, housing, language services, and employment/training services.
- And when the above is established, parents would be entitled to expanded parental leave of up to 400 days on the birth or adoption of a child, reducing the need for costly infant care, and allowing more parents to stay home with their babies during the critical period of development, when the infant-parent bond is established.

This comprehensive model applies logic, best practice, and evidence to the way we organize, manage, deliver, and account for services for children. It reflects what literally thousands of parents and practitioners told me – to make effective use of the facilities and resources we have, eliminate bureaucratic duplication, and respond to the needs of modern families, in order to benefit children.

When the model is fully implemented, all our elementary schools will be true community hubs for children and their families. Two hundred and twenty-seven thousand more 4- and 5-year-olds will have access to full-day learning. Many thousands of 4- to 12-year-olds will be able to attend extended day programs, where fees are more affordable to many more parents.

Our youngest learners and their families will enjoy pre- and postnatal supports, playgroups, parent resources, and expanded opportunities for flexible early learning/care, all offered in one-stop Best Start Child and Family Centres. And in the not too distant future, I see more parents using these centres as they foster their attachment to their new babies during their extended parental leave.

The new system would be developed under an Early Years Policy Framework and led by a new Early Years Division in the Ministry of Education providing overall leadership, direction, and improved accountability.

The implementation plan I am proposing for full-day learning starts in 2010–11. Within five years of full implementation, we can expect to see significant improvement in the numbers of Ontario children entering Grade 1 with the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills necessary to succeed.

Over time, we can also expect that results like these will continue to multiply and compound as children now and in the future move through the school system with higher levels of academic achievement and well-being.

We will see:

- improvements in Grade 3 and Grade 6 provincial literacy and numeracy results;
- higher secondary school graduation rates;
- higher postsecondary participation and success rates;
- children with challenges being identified earlier and getting help sooner;

Addressing Aboriginal Interests and Concerns

Throughout this report, readers will find the interests and concerns of Aboriginal peoples highlighted. While effective early learning programs are important for all children, they are uniquely important for Aboriginal peoples. (Aboriginal peoples include First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and non-status Aboriginal peoples.)

As a key aspect of my fact-finding, I met with the Chiefs of Ontario First Nations Education Coordinating Unit, conducted roundtables with Aboriginal peoples, met with individual Aboriginal leaders and practitioners, and made visits to on- and off-reserve early learning sites, both urban and rural. I attempted to ensure my outreach extended to a wide range of Aboriginal people, including leaders and elders, educators, and parents. According to the Ministry of Education, there are over 50,000 Aboriginal students who attend provincially funded elementary and secondary schools, including 5,000 children who live in First Nation communities but attend Ontario schools under tuition agreements.[3] Most are either First Nations or Métis, and about 600 are Inuit students.

The implementation of full-day early learning for 4- and 5-year-olds must acknowledge the special concerns of Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities face unique struggles, including coping with the devastating impacts of a range of initiatives such as residential schools, the legacy of which continues to undermine their families and communities. Many expressed how the future of Aboriginal peoples depends on the development of their youngest children. An Ojibway educator said:

> *It is easy to say that our children are our future. But it is the truest of truths that teaching the love of learning to our little ones is the Creator's way of helping us all pass on our traditions and help generations to come to have a more prosperous and healthy future.*

Many reports have highlighted the health of Aboriginal communities, the significant numbers of youth who do not complete high school, and the particular challenges related to living in poverty. I have made a deliberate decision to let those reports speak for themselves and focus on the opportunities full-day learning can offer. (See references in Early Learning: An Updated and Annotated Summary of Evidence.)

- greater well-being of 12-year-olds, including greater resiliency and health outcomes;
- a reduction of youth violence and rates of family poverty.

And as a result, a cost-effective return on our early learning investment will be clear to all Ontario taxpayers.

Building on Our Strengths

Ontario has no shortage of locally grown best practices. We have a vibrant community sector that has developed innovative ways to serve children and their parents.

We have the benefit of decades of experience with Kindergarten. More than 90 per cent of 4- and 5-year-olds attend Kindergarten at least part-time. Ontario has excellent postsecondary institutions with advanced capacity for training our educators. The government has reduced class sizes for primary school students, including those in Junior and Senior Kindergarten. Its focus on literacy and numeracy in schools is showing excellent results in the early grades.

Good work has been done in developing new curriculum for the early years. The Province has also set an ambitious target to reduce child poverty.[3] Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy adds to the Ontario Child Benefit and other initiatives.

The step-by-step transformation I am proposing builds on this excellent service base to make far better use of existing resources and to determine what new investments are necessary in order to better serve children and their families.

Reading This Report

While the main audience for this report is the Premier and the many people who will be called on to implement its recommendations, it is also written with the Ontario parent in mind – like the Premier himself, like me, and like the millions of other parents who honour their children every day through loving support and hope for their futures. When I use the term "parent", I mean not only a child's biological or adoptive parents, but all those people who identify themselves as parents by taking responsibility for the care and well-being of a child. These include extended family members, same-sex families, blended families, and older siblings acting as guardians.

This report is about implementation; it covers the important building blocks necessary to achieve a new child and family service system for Ontario.

Chapter 2 reviews briefly the evidence on which my conclusions are based. A comprehensive review of the research is contained in a companion document titled Early Learning: An Updated and Annotated Summary of Evidence. References to findings in my report can be found in this document, which can be downloaded from the Early Learning Advisor – Ontario website at www.ontario.ca/earlylearning.

Chapter 3 describes how the new system will be implemented, including the system leadership needed, the early learning programming framework and curriculum, staffing, parent engagement, monitoring and reporting of children's progress, and community planning. Another important companion document in development is the Early Learning Program Curriculum discussed in section 3.2. It will be available shortly at www.ontario.ca/earlylearning.

Our best future is one in which all children are healthy and secure; emotionally and socially competent; eager, confident, and successful learners; and respectful of the diversity of their peers.

Listening and Learning

I have sought and received the very best knowledge, advice, and experience to enable me to write this report. I have met with large groups and small across this province – from Windsor and London to Trenton and Ottawa, from Thunder Bay and Fort Frances to North Bay and Timiskaming, from Toronto and Niagara to Webequie and Sandy Lake (two far north First Nations reserves).

I have talked with and heard from countless parents and people on the front lines of service in schools, family support programs, child care centres, and public health agencies; community, advocacy, municipal, and school board leaders; and representatives from Aboriginal communities, labour groups, economists, business leaders, and more. I have "shadowed" outstanding practitioners to learn first-hand the incredible difference they make in the lives of children and their families. And I have consulted with experts in other jurisdictions in Canada and Europe.

A website was set up to encourage understanding and dialogue. There were nearly 13,000 "hits" and I received more than 2,300 submissions and over 2,000 emails and telephone calls. I have been in contact with nearly 700 organizations in Ontario, and I have reviewed volumes of research.

I conducted 83 community fact-finding roundtables all over Ontario. Each roundtable represented a diverse gathering of parents, educators, and others. Participants were encouraged to contact me regarding additional ideas or concerns. In total, almost 3,500 people participated in these roundtables, and 24 per cent followed up at least once by sending personal emails. All of this provided a remarkable number of memorable moments of learning, including the wisdom of an Aboriginal elder in the far northern reaches of our province, a coffee shop chat with new moms, and a "show and tell" circle with 4- and 5-year-olds who gave me their fresh and unfettered sense of what matters to them.

Chapter 4 reviews funding and chapter 5 discusses implementation success criteria and timelines. There are recommendations in chapters 3, 4, and 5. They are to be read as an integrated and integrating whole. They are interdependent parts of a plan for systemic change. Endnotes at the conclusion of the report provide more detail.

Our Best Future

All Ontario will benefit as more of our children do better in school, build great careers, have their own children, and contribute to our economic prosperity and social cohesion.

All Ontario will benefit when we can say that our early learning system has contributed to Ontario's successful fight against child poverty and campaign against youth violence.

We need will and skill to move Ontario towards an integrated and comprehensive system of child and family services. We need the backing of all political parties and successive governments to succeed over the long term. We will all be learning along the way about how to make programs better each day for children and their families.

Will and skill, moving and improving ... with our best future in mind.

Full-day programs for preschoolers are associated with smoother transitions to Grade 1, increased high school graduation rates, and more postsecondary attendance. Preschool programs can also reduce reading and numeracy gaps for disadvantaged children.

Chapter 2

A Brief Review of the Evidence

Early development takes place in the context of families and communities and is shaped by the day-to-day experiences and environments of early life. The steady drip of daily life establishes pathways for lifelong learning, behaviour and health that are inextricably linked to the development of the whole child.

Early Learning for Every Child Today[5]

Ontario's 1999 Early Years Study[6] popularized the science of early childhood development and recommended that public policy capitalize on this critical life stage by offering quality programs to all young children and their families.

Since then, projects such as Toronto First Duty, Schools Plus in Saskatchewan, Community Schools in South Australia, and Children's Centres in Victoria (Australia) and the United Kingdom have used this vision to consolidate and expand existing children's programming into hubs for child and family services. Their documented innovations provide valuable learning for others and are motivating experimentation with new models of program delivery elsewhere.

The intervening 10 years have seen an explosive growth in the science of early development. New research shows us that the biological pathways developed in early childhood influence health, well-being, learning, and behaviour across the life course. The science strongly indicates that if managed properly, a public policy commitment to improving children's development will have transformative social and economic effects.

Getting there requires smart decisions about program and system design and public investments in early childhood comparable to those allocated for elementary and secondary education.

The Canadian Council on Learning agrees: "Research indicates that the experiences during the first five years of a child's life have a major bearing on his or her future success in school, in the workplace, and many other aspects of a healthy, fulfilling life."[7]

Nobel laureate economist James Heckman observes that big gaps in children's learning are present at age 5 and has shown, with depressing accuracy, how they predict who will complete high school and postsecondary education and who will not. He points to other early markers, including motivational levels, emotional stability, self-control, and sociability, that persist across generations. A recently released U.S. study by McKinsey and Company provides evidence that these kinds of achievement gaps are "the equivalent of a permanent national recession."[8]

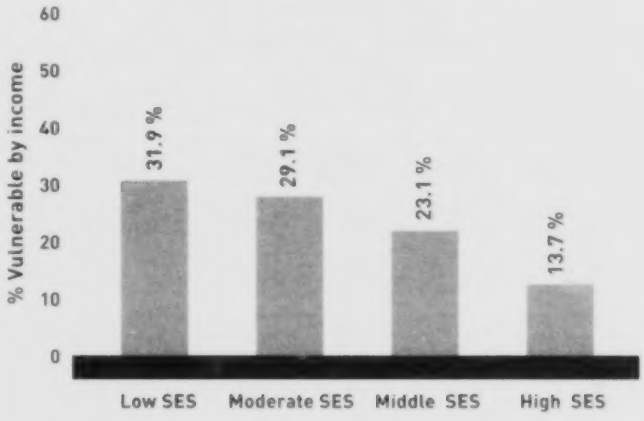
Investment in early learning is crucial to the quality of our labour force today and tomorrow. Early learning is the most cost-effective path to making our education system more productive.

Len Crispino, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2009

Early learning opportunities that complement the learning environment at home do make a difference. The benefits resonate with the economic and fiscal health of a jurisdiction. They also resonate in the health, safety, and vitality of neighbourhoods by creating "welcome centres" for all young children and families, helping to reduce the isolation and exclusion too often experienced by disadvantaged communities.

For policy makers worried about demographic stability and associated economic issues, wide access to quality early childhood programs is associated with rising birth rates and reduced population mobility.

Canada: % Vulnerable by Socio-economic Status[9]



Vulnerable children are not limited to low-income families since many "vulnerabilities" are not income sensitive. Analyses show that the majority of vulnerable children – more than 60 per cent – live in moderate, middle class and affluent families.

Social harmony, high quality schools supported by effective learning opportunities for our youngest, and quality public services, support economic stability.

Toronto Board of Trade, 2009

Many studies[10] have documented the racialization and feminization of child and family poverty, concluding that children living in poverty are:

- more likely to be low birth weight babies and have weight-related diabetes and poor nutrition;
- 2.5 times more likely to have a disability;
- more likely to have learning, behavioural, and emotional problems;
- exposed to higher rates of abuse and violence;
- less likely to be supported by extended health plans;
- less likely to have access to preschool, cultural, recreational, and after-school programs.

Early childhood programs that help compensate children for difficult home and community environments, at the same time as they support parents to work or upgrade their job skills, are highly effective at reducing the rate and depth of family poverty.

Canadian researchers have also demonstrated that while effective early learning programs are very crucial for some, they benefit all. Vulnerable children are not limited to low-income families since many "vulnerabilities" are not income sensitive. Their analyses show that the majority of vulnerable children – more than 60 per cent – live in moderate, middle-class and affluent families.[11]

While poverty is associated with risks for young children, policies targeted solely to disadvantaged communities actually miss the majority of vulnerable children. A universal approach to program provision, in which dedicated poverty reduction initiatives are embedded, has been found to magnify the social, economic, and academic benefits.

Two Perspectives: Same Advice

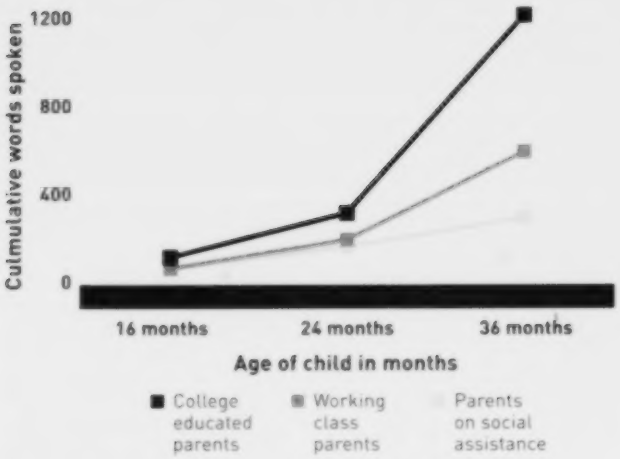
Two recent major reviews of very different topics cited investment in early childhood as a vital driver of economic and social progress. Ontario in the Creative Age, by Roger Martin and Richard Florida, advised: "Make early childhood development a high priority. This is the highest payoff investment we can make in our long-run prosperity."[12]

The Roots of Youth Violence report, by Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling, noted: "Given the relationship between undiagnosed literacy problems and behavioural problems later in life, including incarceration in many cases, effective early learning programs can play an enormous identification and prevention role."[13]

Research evidence documents the economic benefits from public spending on quality early childhood programs:

- University of Toronto economists showed a 2:1 payback on public funding for developmentally enriched child care created from the increased taxes paid by working parents, coupled with reduced social service and compensatory education costs.[14]
- Over 40 per cent of the public cost of Quebec's early childhood program is covered by the tax revenues from mothers who otherwise would not be working if low-cost child care was not available.[15]
- A Manitoba study reveals that spending on early childhood programs has an economic multiplier effect on local economies, generating up to $1.7 dollars for every $1 spent.[16]

Disparities in Early Vocabulary Growth[17]



- The Ypsilanti, Michigan, study has spent 40 years tracking the cost-benefits of a preschool and family intervention program on a group of inner city minority children. It calculates $17 in health, justice, and social welfare savings for every $1 spent on the program.[18]
- Heckman calculates a 7:1 return on public investment for programs for young children compared to a 1:1 payback from adult education.[19]

A major source of the human capital benefits comes from the link between children's participation in quality early years programs and future educational attainment. A Rutgers University study found that prolonged and regular full-day preschool attendance significantly increased children's verbal and mathematics test scores in Grade 1 and beyond.[20]

Results from Canadian studies concur with U.S. research: full-day preschool programs promote children's successful transition to formal schooling.[21] Children attending full-day programs had better academic performance and social success as they entered Grade 1 than children who attended half-day programs.

There is a growing body of evidence that some of the greatest returns on taxpayers' investments are those targeted to Canada's youngest citizens. Every dollar spent in ensuring a healthy start in the early years will reduce the long-term social costs associated with health care, addictions, crime, unemployment and welfare. As well, it will ensure Canadian children become better educated, well adjusted and more productive adults.

Dr. David Butler-Jones, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer[22]

The imperative for action is grounded in the evidence cited above. The recommendations in this report are guided by research documenting the elements for success in early learning programs within a comprehensive child and family framework.

No matter how you look at it, the focused strategic investment in the early years that I am recommending pays huge dividends for the success and well-being of individuals and our society. Simply put, there is no wiser investment for our best future.

References to findings in this report can be found in: Early Learning – An Updated and Annotated Summary of Evidence, which can be downloaded from the Early Learning Advisor – Ontario website at www.ontario.ca/earlylearning.

Internationally, many early childhood leaders, including Sweden, Iceland, and New Zealand, have transferred responsibility for the care and development of their youngest children to their education departments. In Canada, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have taken steps to combine their education and children's ministries, and Quebec schools are responsible for extended day programs for children aged 5 to 12 years.

Chapter 3

Full-Day Learning: Leaving the Patchwork Behind

[We] must consider the needs and concerns for children 0–12 and their families, rather than just those children of kindergarten age. We cannot afford to perpetuate a divided and fragmented service system anymore.

Etobicoke Brighter Futures Coalition

Recommendations:

1. **The Province should create a continuum of early learning, child care, and family supports for children from the prenatal period through to adolescence, under the leadership of the Minister of Education.**

2. **The Ministry of Education should establish an Early Years Division to develop and implement an Early Years Policy Framework that will create a continuity of early learning experiences for children from 0 to 8 years of age.**

3. **The Early Years Policy Framework should mandate school boards to offer:**

   - a two-year, full-day Early Learning Program prior to Grade 1, available to all children who turn 4 by December 31. Children's participation would be by parental choice, with parents having the option of a half, full (school hours), or fee-based extended day of programming;
   - at the request of 15 or more families in a school, a fee-based Extended Day Primary program, offering developmentally enriched programming for children from 6 to 8 years old;
   - at the request of 15 or more families in a school, fee-based after-school programming for children from 9 to 12 years old. School boards may deliver the programming directly or enlist the support of municipal parks and recreation services or community agencies;
   - extended programming that operates 50 weeks a year, including fee-based activities during school breaks and summer vacations. Daily hours of operation would be determined by school boards in response to the needs of families in their communities.

4. **The Early Years Policy Framework should also guide the transformation of programming for Ontario's youngest learners. Municipal authorities, with the necessary resources, should be mandated to plan, develop, support, and monitor an integrated network of Best Start Child and Family Centres providing families with:**

   - flexible, part-time/full-day/full-year early learning/care options for children up to age 4;
   - prenatal and postnatal information and supports;
   - parenting and family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and playgroups;
   - nutrition and nutrition counselling;
   - early identification and intervention resources;
   - links to special needs treatment and community resources, including libraries, recreation and community centres, health care, family counselling, housing, language services, and employment/training services.

5. **To support the service continuum and support children's transitions to the Early Learning Program, the preferred location for Best Start Child and Family Centres is schools. Non-school locations would be partnered with a school or family of schools.**

6. **Under the systems management of municipal authorities, the direct operation of Best Start Child and Family Centres could be provided by local or regional governments, school boards, postsecondary institutions, or non-profit agencies.**

7. **Non-profit and commercial providers may continue to operate licensed child care in accordance with current program standards. All service expansion would take place through Best Start Child and Family Centres and school boards.**

8. **The expectations set out in the Early Years Policy Framework should be operationalized through local Early Years Service Plans developed by municipal authorities in partnership with school boards and community partners. Outcomes and targets should be developed through provincial-municipal collaboration and funding flowed through municipal authorities and school boards to meet targets.**

Governance Model for a Child and Family Service System Birth to 12 Years

Ministry of Education
Early Years Division
• "Leader among leaders" providing direct accountability for delivery of early learning & care programs (0–8 years)*
* Policy lead for after-school programming (9–12 years)
Early Years Policy Framework
• Legislative requirements, policy, funding, accountability
Ministry of Children & Youth Services
• Special needs treatment services
• Child welfare
• Poverty Reduction Strategy
• Ontario Child Benefit
Municipal authorities "leader among leaders" working with school boards & Best Start partners to develop Early Years Service Plans that would include outcomes, benchmarks, timelines, & accountability mechanisms
Municipal Early Years Service Contracts
Stable multi-year funding
School Board Early Years Service Contracts
Stable multi-year funding
Municipal authorities provide systems management for a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres:
• Pre-/postnatal information, supports, & home visiting
• Parent/child programming & parenting information
• Nutrition/nutrition counselling
• Flexible early learning/care to age 4
• Early identification & intervention
• Links to community resources – employment, language learning, immigration, housing, family counselling, etc.
School boards directly operate community schools:
• Early Learning Program (4–5 years)
• Extended Day Primary program (6–8 years)
• After-school programming (9–12 years)

Creating Coherence from a Chaotic Mix

The Best Start strategy, launched in 2004, was aimed at improving service coordination in Ontario's communities through the creation of "tables" with representation from municipalities, school boards, parents, and community agencies. Through their efforts, significant improvement occurred in many communities, but progress has been hobbled by the partners' different governance, funding, and legislative mandates, as well as the voluntary nature of the process.

Best Start laid the groundwork for what I am proposing, but real systemic change needs more than resources and goodwill. Without fundamentally changing the approach to delivery and doing the re-engineering required to integrate services into something new, Ontario will be stalled at the level of "improving coordination". To invest in more improved coordination would be the enemy of the real change required.

Imagine ...

The mother of a 4-year-old girl and a new baby boy is welcomed at the school door by the principal, who asks how she and her family are doing and reminds her about an upcoming school festival. The mother is on parental leave while the father works. He plans to go on leave when she returns to her job.

The older child runs off to the Early Learning Program while her mother has her own morning planned at the Best Start Child and Family Centre, where she has a postnatal consultation with a public health nurse. Last year, when her older child attended the centre, educators identified a difficulty with the child's communication skills. With some extra help the little girl is now doing well in the Early Learning Program and can't wait to talk about everything she does. She had no trouble adjusting. The Early Learning Program is just down the hall from the centre and she already knew the staff.

Hours after the last bell has rung the school is still buzzing. Parents come and go, picking up children who have participated in extended programming. There are recreational, arts, and social activities and homework clubs for the children, and a concurrent parenting program is running. One of the children has painted a picture of the school, which the principal has put on the bulletin board in the main foyer. It shows a building with a long line of stick figures, tall and small, heading towards a big open door.

Why Education Should Take the Lead

We need far more than better coordination. We need sustained, focused leadership and accountability. Therefore, the accountability transformation I am recommending is a single ministry responsible for driving change, providing overall governance and clear policy direction. While effective horizontal collaboration and cooperation will continue to be required across ministries, the government needs a single minister and ministry to hold accountable for the well-being and learning success of young children.

Parents, practitioners, and experts alike have convinced me that the public education system is best positioned to address the fragmentation that plagues early childhood programming and to expand access and opportunities for children.[23] The Ministry of Education is already responsible for some programming for children before Grade 1, including Kindergarten and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres. Education is supported by a well-developed infrastructure at the central, regional, and local level. Importantly, education is firmly rooted in the public domain and dedicated to universal service. Education is about learning.

One of the major barriers to building an integrated early years system in Ontario is the historic divide between education and child care. Separated by legislation, funding, and delivery structures, Kindergarten with its education roots is viewed as contributing to the public good whereas child care is mired in its social welfare status.[24] Advocates have long recognized that "good child care educates" and "good education cares". It's time to erase the divide.

Studies document that where early childhood programs are split by auspice, their quality, accessibility, and accountability suffer. I am taking lessons from what others have done. Internationally, many jurisdictions have consolidated their child care and education departments. In Canada, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have taken the first steps to combine their education and children's ministries, and Quebec schools are responsible for extended day programs for children aged 5 to 12 years.

The Early Years Division will work closely with other ministries, including Children and Youth Services; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Health and Long-Term Care; Community and Social Services; Health Promotion; Training, Colleges and Universities; Citizenship and Immigration; Aboriginal Affairs; and the Office of Francophone Affairs. This work needs to connect to other key government initiatives, including Ontario's critically important Poverty Reduction Strategy and the work of the Ministry of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.

The new Early Years Division should be led by an Assistant Deputy Minister. The division's Early Years Policy Framework would encompass the requirements of the Day Nurseries Act and provincial guidelines for other early childhood programs, creating a new set of policy, funding,

and accountability mechanisms defining the quality standards, goals, time frames, and benchmarks for the new system.

The School as Hub to the Community

Schools are in every corner of the province. In an increasingly stressful and divided society, they can open the doors to social inclusion and provide a sense of belonging for all children and families. Crucial to the new vision for Ontario is the transformation of all elementary schools into community schools, open to their neighbourhoods and capable of providing families with opportunities for children's learning, care, health, culture, arts, and recreation from the prenatal period through to adolescence.

Are schools up to the task? Not everyone thinks so. Concerns have been voiced that some schools are often unwelcoming to parents, dismissive of the expertise of community partners, and insensitive to the opportunities that diversity can provide for all students. Yet I know that many schools are true and effective learning centres, alive and reflective of the communities they serve. We must support all schools to take on the role of provider of full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-old children and assume the important role of community hub.

Many experts and community leaders are calling for a change in how we fund and use schools in our communities. Instead of viewing school facilities as single-function spaces to educate children, we should start treating schools as community resources where a range of complementary activities can take place.

> *School boards need to see the school as belonging to the community. If a board is considering a school closure, it needs to ensure that the community is an active participant in co-determining its future use. With a little imagination and strong active partnerships, maybe many of these schools can remain open and become models for the community hub concept. School boards and municipalities are serving the same taxpayers, the same citizens, the same families. We need to act on this simple fact.*
>
> *Doug Reycraft, Mayor of Southwest Middlesex, former educator, former president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario*

The Toronto First Duty Model

The Toronto First Duty model integrates existing child and family services to provide a seamless continuum of supports, beginning with prenatal and postnatal information and nutrition resources, parent-child activities, and programs that encourage parents to choose appropriate behaviour guidance strategies and to read and talk more with their children. As children progress through play-groups to enrol in the flexible program for preschool children, the program for 4- and 5-year-olds, and primary school, they and their families have continuous access to supports such as health screening, special needs interventions, family counselling, and employment, immigration, and housing services.

By integrating their staffing, resources, administration, and facilities, the school, public health, municipal, and community partners are able to provide children with an invisible cocoon of support and nurturing. Surveys noted that parents view the school as the centre of child and family services, and are more likely to feel empowered to talk to their child's teacher and to help their child learn at home. This capacity building worked for parents who were new to Canada, as well as for those born here. The school-based location was also found to support access to families from across the socio-economic spectrum.

Research also suggests that the integrated model serves more families – in ways they want to be served – with higher quality programs, for the same costs as traditional "siloed" delivery. (More information on programming and research is available on the Toronto First Duty website: www.toronto.ca/firstduty.)

Building a Continuum for Children from Birth to Age 12: Program Components

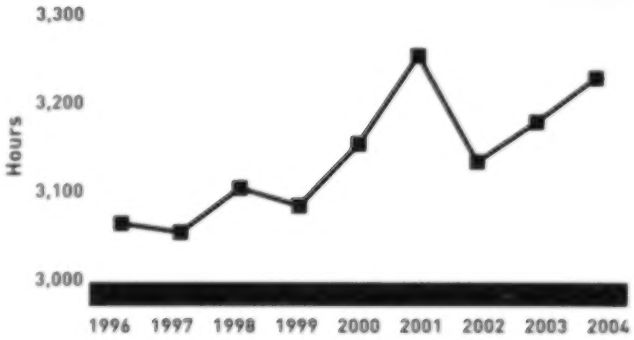
The system architecture that I am proposing is rooted in an understanding of lifelong learning and a life-cycle approach to human development. It recognizes that supports are cumulative, with each experience building on preceding ones, and that short-term or "now-and-then" initiatives are not enough to sustain improvement in outcomes. Research has shown that starting early can change developmental trajectories for our youngest children and break intergenerational cycles of illiteracy, poverty, social isolation, and poor health.

A long childhood is unique to humans, and within childhood there are distinct phases of development. My major focus is the prenatal to age 8 period. Care and learning opportunities designed for children younger than age 8 are different from, but critical contributors to, later forms of educational success. Around age 8, children transition to more analytical thinking. That is why Ontario and many other jurisdictions test children's level of literacy and numeracy in Grade 3 to determine their readiness for new curriculum expectations in Grade 4 and beyond.

Schools as Hubs in Rural Communities

The response to full-day early learning offered by the Near North District School Board has been overwhelmingly positive. Although distance is a challenge, preschools and full-day Kindergartens located in elementary schools are found to have higher attendance than those not located in schools. Submissions from rural councils[25] have recommended that schools become hubs for early childhood and family programming, staffed by qualified educators supported by an integrated curriculum. In special circumstances, when distance and lack of transportation create barriers to attendance, it was suggested that full-day learning could be delivered in off-site community locations and linked to a community school.

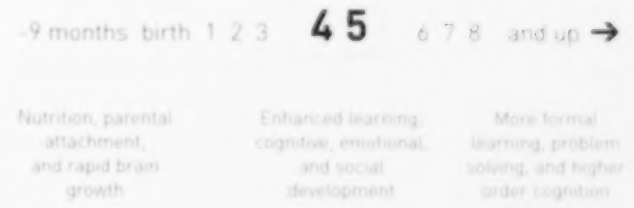
Annual Average Hours Worked by Families Raising Children, Canada, 1996–2004[26]



A: EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

The Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-olds being proposed is not what is often described as the school day with "wraparound" child care, where children go back and forth between two distinct programs with different adults two to four times daily. The Early Learning Program, whether attended for a half, full, or extended day, is a single program with a single pedagogical and curriculum approach planned and delivered by qualified educators using common space and resources. (Pedagogy is about how learning takes place and how the curriculum is put into action.) Although it is expected that most parents will choose full-day programming and some extended learning, parents could elect to send their children half-days. The choice is theirs. This would be a year-round, school-board-operated program. There is no parent fee charged for the traditional school day. I received strong support and understanding from parents that fees would be charged for the extended day/year program, and subsidies should be made available for those who require them.

Birth to 8 Years: A Unique Period in Human Development



A Continuum

A continuum provides a continuity of people, environments, expectations, and programming for children and parents, and careful management of transitions from home to group experiences like child care or playgroups, between child care and preschool or Kindergarten, and between preschool and the primary school grades.

Another way of looking at the continuum comes from a municipal children's service manager, who says: "We have introduced the notion of the 'lost mitten', which is my way of defining the stress on children when they have to make so many transitions in one day ... "

B: EXTENDED DAY PRIMARY PROGRAM

The implementation of the Early Learning Program and the consolidation and reorganization of existing resources will allow school boards to offer a full-year Extended Day Primary program for 6- to 8-year-olds at the request of 15 or more families in a school.

This program will facilitate children's transition from the Early Learning Program to formal schooling, with homework help, recreational, and other activities, and it will enhance their physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development. This program will be funded by parent fees and subsidies as necessary.

Reducing Hunger and Obesity

Providing healthy meals and snacks as part of activities can be an effective, non-stigmatizing means to reduce child hunger. Equally compelling, food programs can help address childhood obesity by promoting knowledge about nutrition and healthy food choices.

C: AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

In the new child and family service system, school boards would be charged with developing after-school programming for students aged 9 to 12 at the request of 15 families or more in a school. Schools could organize their own activities or enlist municipal and/or other community partners.

Children in this age group require programs reflective of their growing maturity. Providing consistent enrichment activities such as music, art, sports, conflict resolution, cultural experiences, and other alternative ways of learning can improve social skills, give children more confidence, and create higher educational and career aspirations. Summer and after-school activities have also been found to significantly narrow the achievement gap for disadvantaged children.

Organized group activities are preferable to informal arrangements. Children in after-school programs tend to read, use the computer, complete homework assignments, and interact with adults more often than children placed with informal caregivers. Children left in the care of a sibling have the highest rate of behavioral problems at school, as well as the highest rate of trouble with authorities.

The introduction of full-day learning and the reorganization and consolidation of services will create cost-efficiencies to allow a more affordable parent fee for extended day activities. See chapter 4 for further discussion of fees and subsidies.

Addressing the Bottom Line

In their latest contribution to our understanding, the Hon. Margaret McCain, Dr. Fraser Mustard, and Dr. Stuart Shanker noted:

> *The evidence is compelling and overwhelming: well-funded, integrated, child development and parenting programs improve the cognitive and social functioning of all children. If properly linked to labour, health, and social services, early childhood programs can deliver additional outcomes, such as enhanced maternal employment, gender equity, less family poverty, better parenting skills, and greater family and community cohesion. Quality early learning programs are not only good for children and families; they are good for the bottom line. Focused public spending on young children provides returns that outstrip any other type of human capital investment.*[27]

D: BEST START CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

The crucial developmental importance of the early years has been featured in study after study, yet families continue to struggle to find the services they need. Too often programs are not available. Child care settings are rarely linked to parent support programs, and neither are linked to schools.

While I propose that school boards take the lead in offering the new Early Learning Program and extended day/year activities for primary and junior students, I am also asking municipal authorities to play a key role in the new system. They are best positioned to lead the transformation of service delivery for our youngest learners. They already manage children's services, make a substantial contribution to operations, undertake community planning, and promote program quality. They provide direct links to public health, libraries, and parks and recreation facilities. By municipal authorities, I mean the level of local government with responsibility for human services – Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). The municipal role in service planning is discussed further in section 3.4.

With the appropriate resources required, municipal authorities would be responsible for the creation and systems management of a community network of Best Start Child and Family Centres. These new centres would be developed and expanded by consolidating and re-engineering the resources, governance, and mandates of existing child care, family resource, and early intervention services. This includes regulated group and home child care, family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, Child Care Special Needs Resourcing, and family literacy coordinators. Bringing the various early childhood services under a single system management was urged by a number of submissions[28] and was a scenario identified in the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review.

By merging program functions under a single administration, Best Start Child and Family Centres will be able to offer a one-stop opportunity for parents and caregivers to support children's earliest development.[29] All families will be welcome to participate. As now, there will be no charge for many child and family programs, and parent fees will continue to apply to child care.

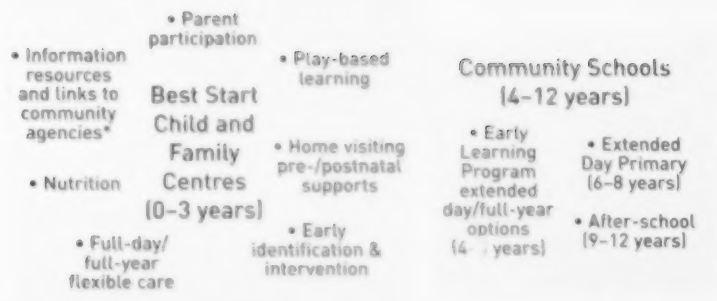
The federal government also directly resources child and family programs for targeted communities, including family supports through the Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and nutrition and nutrition counselling for expectant and new mothers through the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP). To further promote seamless access to programming, I suggest that the Province explore with the federal government linking these programs to Best Start Child and Family Centres. Aboriginal Head Start programs could also benefit from being linked to the centres.

Best Start Child and Family Centres could be operated by municipal authorities, school boards, postsecondary institutions, or non-profit agencies.

Non-profit and commercial providers may continue to operate licensed child care in accordance with current program standards. All service expansion, however, should take place through Best Start Child and Family Centres and school boards.

Transitioning from Chaos to Integrated Best Start Child and Family Centres

Ontario's Child and Family Service System 2010 and Beyond at the Local Level


• Parent participation
• Information resources and links to community agencies*
• Play-based learning
Best Start Child and Family Centres (0–3 years)
• Nutrition
• Home visiting pre-/postnatal supports
• Full-day/ full-year flexible care
• Early identification & intervention
Community Schools (4–12 years)
• Early Learning Program extended day/full-year options (4– years)
• Extended Day Primary (6–8 years)
• After-school (9–12 years)

* including libraries, recreation and community centres, health services, family counselling, employment training, language learning, settlement services, and housing

More Timely Intervention for Children

Our son was diagnosed with a learning disability in February of 2006 – 2 years later and our son has just received his first day of therapy and according to our discussions with other parents, we are the lucky ones.

Parent, Mississauga

My son is a wonderful, mostly typical four year-old boy. He is also diagnosed with a rare chromosome disorder. He has just completed his JK year, which was a special and intensive program that provided speech, occupational and physical therapy every morning along with pool therapy. He also received other fine and gross motor interventions, along with the regular adapted JK curriculum taught by a teacher and an assistant ... It has been an investment that will have lifelong returns for my son, but I do not believe it is available for enough children and families throughout the province.

Parent, Sudbury

It is important to monitor the developmental progress of all children and essential for children with special challenges. A comprehensive approach will identify many children who are currently muddling through just "below the radar".

Best Start Child and Family Centres should play a central role in the consolidation and re-engineering of early identification and intervention programs. Centre staff will be qualified to notice developmental delays, initiate appropriate responses, and know when more specialized interventions are required. They must be highly effective communicators, knowing how to alert parents to potential problems and provide assurances of their ongoing support.[30]

For children with identified challenges, professionals will work with parents to develop an intervention strategy, becoming the child's advocate, either offering direct service or brokering timely access to community agencies that provide more intensive treatments. The centres will have links to specialized treatment services, such as Children's Mental Health Centres, children's treatment centres, developmental pediatricians, child development clinics, and other services for children with physical and developmental challenges.

Developing Best Start Child and Family Centres

The introduction of publicly funded full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds and the consolidation and re-engineering of existing stand-alone services will expand learning opportunities for younger children. Resources now devoted to child care for children from 4 to 12 years old will be released to Best Start Child and Family Centres as schools assume full responsibility for this age group. As staff working in existing child care with 4- to 12-year-olds take on positions with school boards, their wage grants would transfer to programs for younger children. Lower parent fees for the 4-to-12 age group mean fewer families would require subsidies, freeing up funds to expand access to others. Space in child care occupied by programs for 4- to 12-year-olds would now be available for younger children, parent/child playgroups, and parent and caregiver supports, or to deliver special needs services.

For example, in a school with a child care centre, a Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, or an Ontario Early Years Centre, these programs would merge into a Best Start Child and Family Centre. The services each offers would be rationalized, providing one-stop access for children and families. The consolidation of parenting, special needs resources, and home and group child care under a single governance will allow staff to use the full breadth of their training.

Municipal authorities will play a major role in helping service providers to merge their governance structures and resources. Transitional funding will support the reorganization, and capital funds will be needed to retrofit space for new purposes.

Child-specific plans and interventions will follow the child through early childhood, into the Early Learning Program, and on to the elementary grades, where special education resources will continue as required. Building on current best practice, Best Start Child and Family Centres could provide a less clinical, more family friendly environment for other agencies and specialized professionals to deliver selected interventions related to the Infant Development Program, Infant Hearing Program, Behaviour Management Program, and Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program.

Research suggests that 75 per cent of children with emotional and behavioural disorders do not receive adequate mental health services, and that inter-agency efforts to integrate services would be enhanced with improved parent involvement. Best Start Child and Family Centres could serve to reduce barriers to families and support the identification of developmental challenges sooner rather than later.[31]

I continue to be concerned about how long it takes for children's challenges to be diagnosed and addressed. I received so many heart-wrenching emails. How long should this cycle take? Obviously, some issues are more complex than others, and having time guarantees is fraught with problems. That said, can we aspire to establish a time period, extending from identification of a problem to clear signs of improvement, that is no longer than six months with targets for improvements?

Community-Based Service Planning and Management

The high-level goals and outcomes set out in the Province's Early Years Policy Framework need to be planned, managed, implemented, and monitored at the local level. The lead for this belongs with municipal authorities, working in partnership with boards of education and other community Best Start partners. In a province that covers a wide geographic territory and is home to over 13 million people, municipal authorities are uniquely positioned to translate provincial goals to ensure that local priorities and circumstances are considered.

In a shared accountability arrangement with the Province, municipalities would operationalize the expectations laid out in the Province's Early Years Policy Framework through local Early Years Service Plans. They would be multi-year, multi-level plans and would align with other important regional planning processes. They would be attached to multi-year, negotiated provincial-regional service contracts to secure the flow of funding to municipalities and school boards.

Designating municipal authorities as the lead in this process does not replace the community-building process developed under Best Start, but rather gives it the

authority necessary to drive the changes needed. The planning process will require effective collaboration among service providers. Representatives from the community should be included at the planning table and participants renewed on a regular schedule.

Building on their current role, municipalities are well positioned to transform child care and other early childhood programs into a child and family service system by:

- developing and operationalizing local Early Years Service Plans, including setting and tracking local outcome targets;
- serving as the single system administrator and funder of early childhood services at the local level;
- administering fee subsidies;
- promoting quality by providing streamlined regulatory oversight;
- directly operating and overseeing the operations of Best Start Child and Family Centres;
- providing local oversight of child care programs operating outside the umbrella of Best Start Child and Family Centres and schools;
- collaborating with local Public Health Units to incorporate Healthy Babies Healthy Children into Best Start Child and Family Centres;
- providing web-based information on child and family programs and activities in the community they serve.

While municipal governments would maintain their current financial contributions, it is my expectation that appropriate resources would be transferred to support them in carrying out their functions, for example, savings generated from the implementation of the Early Learning Program, resources from programs merging into Best Start Child and Family Centres, resources associated with regulation and oversight, and transitional and capital funding as required.

Keep All Kids "Turned On" to Learning

Children in both affluent and lower income communities benefit during the school year when learning resources are "turned on" for all children. But during the summer the public faucet is turned off, and the flow of resources to a child depends on what parents can provide. Middle-class families are able to build their children's literacy skills over the summer. Low-income children do not have the same access and lose skills. As summer learning losses accumulate over the years, disadvantaged students fall further and further behind.[32]

Expanded Parental Leave: The 400-Day Plan

Recommendations:

9. **The Province should build on existing maternal and parental leave options to design a made-in-Ontario Parental Leave and Benefit Program that:**
   - provides parents with paid leave after the birth or adoption of a child for up to 400 days;
   - expands coverage to include self-employed parents;
   - provides flexibility to allow parents to extend and supplement their leave by returning to work part-time;
   - provides 10 days annually of job-protected family leave for parents with children under the age of 12;
   - designates six weeks for the exclusive use of the father or other non-birthing parent; if not used, this time would be deducted from the 400 days. This provision would not reduce the leave of single parents.

Gender Equality Ranks[33]

COUNTRY	GENDER EQUALITY RANK	GENDER EMPOWERMENT RANK
Sweden	1	1
Norway	2	2
Finland	3	3
Iceland	4	4
Canada	**18**	**36**

When the Early Learning Program is established and the reorganization of children's services is well on its way, consideration should be given to modernizing our approach to parental leave at the birth or adoption of children. Parental leave is a critical foundational support for human development, encompassing many issues simultaneously. It:

- protects the health of the mother and child;
- improves the health and development of the child by supporting parental attachment;
- sustains family income following the birth of a child;
- improves and supports workforce stability;
- recognizes the social and economic importance of child-bearing;
- reduces expensive infant care costs;
- contributes to increased fertility rates.

Paid parental leave is also essential to gender equity, allowing both women and men to enjoy parenthood while maintaining their attachment to economic and civic life.

In an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) review of 20 early childhood systems in developed countries, Canada's parental leave policy was found to be in the bottom third of effective programs.[34] The absence of adequate supports following the birth or adoption of a child actually penalizes families for having children. Examples exist of programs in other jurisdictions, such as Quebec's unique approach to parental leave.[35]

Fathers and other non-birthing parents also need time off work to bond with their babies. The proposed policy will have profound longer term impacts on their active involvement in the lives of their children. Parental leave for partners is not simply an opportunity to help a mother with her parenting. Given that up to one in five mothers experiences postnatal depression, family leave policies should not preclude mothers and their partners from taking time together. Prenatal support programs should better inform fathers of the issues surrounding birth and new parenthood, and the importance of their active participation in their child's development from birth.

3.2 Programming for Success

Children who thrive in primary school and whose pathways are set for later academic success are those who enter Grade 1 with strong oral communication skills and are confident, able to make friends, persistent and creative in completing tasks and solving problems, and excited to learn. These are the same qualities that children strengthen through high quality play during their early years.

Early Learning for Every Child Today[36]

There are important links between play and learning in the areas of problem solving, language, numeracy, and social skills. Through intentionally planned play activities, children are able to show what they know and can do. As they play, children apply new learning.

Recommendations:

10. The Early Years Policy Framework should contain:

- Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) as the curriculum and pedagogical framework for Best Start Child and Family Centres, the Early Learning Program, and the Extended Day Primary program;
- the Continuum of Development in ELECT as the central tool for ongoing individual observation and documentation in programs for children from 0 to 8 years old;
- based on ELECT, guidelines for facilities and outdoor spaces, scheduling, and appropriate behaviour guidance practices to accommodate programs for children from 0 to 8 years old and their families;
- the Early Learning Program Curriculum (for 4- and 5-year-olds) as the curriculum in the Early Learning Program and adapted for use in French-language settings;
- strategies to promote the effective engagement of parents in their children's learning, with emphasis on regional and local efforts.

11. The Early Years Division at the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Aboriginal educators and organizations, should adapt ELECT to reflect Aboriginal content for use in all early childhood settings in Ontario.

A Common Framework for Early Years Programming

As the Special Advisor on Early Learning, I had the pleasure of visiting many programs in many communities. I saw children learning to get along with each other, learning to manage conflicts and solve problems, learning to tell stories and talk or write about their fears and dreams, and learning to build towers, climb ladders, explore crafts, and throw balls. If you close your eyes and listen to the sounds of a busy early childhood program, you should hear an energetic and happy hum. There are excited voices relating the latest discovery. Educators are guiding it all, joining in and responding in ways that extend and consolidate the learning. There is laughter and exuberance.

I also heard concerns about the perception of creeping "schoolification" of curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood programs. Some Kindergarten teachers said they were feeling pressure to use more direct instruction in a structured classroom setting, rather than helping young children to learn through play-based activities that draw out the capacities of each child.

Play is serious business for the development of young learners. This is such an important understanding. During my fact-finding, I observed people recoil at the thought of spending resources on "just having kids play". But research and best practice indicate clearly that a deliberate and effective play-based approach supports young children's cognitive development. When well designed, such an approach taps into children's individual interests, draws out their emerging capacities, and responds to their sense of inquiry and exploration of the world around them. It generates highly motivated children enjoying an environment where the learning outcomes of a curriculum are more likely to be achieved. Learning to match sounds and letters is necessary to learn to read, but it is not sufficient to develop language skills required for reading to learn. Similarly, learning to count is not enough for children to develop number understanding that is required for mathematics.

Our new child and family service system must have high-quality, play-based programming based on the best evidence available. The quality of children's daily lives in early childhood matters. How time is scheduled, how space is organized, and how things are set up to engage young minds matter to the quality of early learning environments. Continuity of expectations and approaches to learning throughout the day and across the days and years of early childhood promotes academic success in the long term. Smooth transitions for young children have a significant positive effect on their social and emotional well-being, and this creates a better context for learning.

Children from birth to age 8 in Ontario are now served by schools and by many other different early childhood programs, each with its own unique approach to learning. Ontario does not require or provide a common curriculum in regulated child care. Different guidelines on programming apply to Ontario Early Years Centres and to

Preschool Speech and Language programs. The Ministry of Education has separate guidelines for programming in Parenting and Family Literacy Centres.

We need a common programming framework for all of Ontario's early childhood settings. Fortunately, thanks to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ontario is well on its way with Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT). Developed by leading child development and education experts, ELECT guides early learning environments for children from infancy through to their transition into the primary years.

ELECT identifies six principles:

1. Early development lays the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health.
2. Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children.
3. Respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion are prerequisites for optimal development and learning.
4. A planned curriculum supports early learning.
5. Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.
6. Knowledgeable and responsive educators are essential in early childhood settings.

ELECT sets out the organization of the early learning environment, child assessment, scheduling of routines and activities, behaviour guidance, and the organization of indoor and outdoor space. It is not only a tool for front-line educators; it also provides guidance for directors, school principals, senior administrators, and other decision makers, helping them to allocate resources and set policies that are in tune with the developmental needs of young children.

The Continuum of Development in ELECT outlines the sequence of skills that children from 0 to 8 years old can be expected to acquire across broad developmental domains (physical, social, emotional, communication/language, and cognitive). It is intended to support observation and documentation for curriculum development purposes.

Many early childhood educators and Kindergarten teachers are now using the Continuum of Development to identify and monitor each child's learning and developmental progress.[37] The specific skills and indicators in the continuum can be reviewed and revised in response to new evidence about young children's development and learning.

The following guidelines of practice define an optimal, holistic curriculum and pedagogy for early learning environments for children from 0 to 8 years old, based on the ELECT principles:

- Observe what children know and can do.
- Schedule adequate time for children's activity and daily routines while reducing transitions.
- Design space to set up optimal physical environments (e.g., natural light indoors, outdoor space, quality equipment, kitchen, staff preparation areas).
- Engage young children and their families.
- Include all children, making adaptations for children with special needs.
- Emphasize emotional literacy, social competence, physical skills, comprehensive language development, emergent literacy, numeracy, inquiry experiences, and creative expression across the curriculum.
- Document children's progress through systematic collection and examination of their work, including compiling observations of educators, parents, and other caregivers.

Too Many Boys Are Struggling

Too many boys are struggling from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and beyond. They are more likely than girls to need remediation, repeat grades, drop out of high school before graduation, and take part in delinquent activities. Their struggles begin in early childhood and are well documented as they enter Grade 1. Differences between how girls and boys fare are grounded in a complex interplay of biological, social, and cultural factors. We need to pay more attention to understanding these complexities to inform programming, staffing, and training.

As Ontario's new system is implemented, ELECT, the Continuum of Development, and guidelines of practice will provide a common approach, tools, and guidance for working with children from 0 to 8 years old, including in Best Start Child and Family Centres, the Early Learning Program, and the primary grades of school. It will promote the use of developmental portfolios that will travel with children, starting with their experiences in Best Start Child and Family Centres and following them into school.

Early Learning Program Curriculum for 4- and 5-Year-Olds

When you walk into a room where the program is successful, you know! Children are engaged in their activities, co-operation is emphasized and mutual respect is evident.

Parent and former Kindergarten teacher, Thunder Bay

Curriculum is an organized system of intentions and plans to promote children's development and learning. It is the sum of experiences, activities, and events that occur within an early childhood program. An explicit curriculum serves other purposes in addition to the child's development: promotion of an even level of quality across programs, provision of guidance and support for educators in their daily practice, and facilitation of communication between parents and staff.

In developing an integrated approach to full-day learning, I had the good counsel of many of Canada's and the world's foremost experts in education and child development. Starting from the common principles and approaches found in ELECT and the Kindergarten Program (revised)[38], a unique guide to curriculum and pedagogy for the Early Learning Program has been created. This major piece of work will allow us to hit the ground running in implementing a new Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-olds.

The Early Learning Program Curriculum and pedagogy include:

- Developmental Skills: specific capacities, processes, abilities, and competencies that are the foundation for later development and learning;
- Essential Outcomes: a compilation of knowledge, skills, and strategies of what children should know and be able to do at entry to Grade 1 (based on Kindergarten Program [revised] learning expectations);
- How Children Demonstrate Their Learning: examples illustrating how children can demonstrate their learning, merging the specific expectations from the Kindergarten Program (revised) with the indicators from ELECT;
- Interactions in the Learning Environment: examples of interactions between children and adults, among children, and among adults in a learning environment. Connections are made to the critical components of parent involvement.

Motivating Learning

Learning happens when educators negotiate an ongoing contract between individual children's emerging developmental skills, interests, and family context and the learning environment and essential outcomes.

Individual Child
- Social, emotional, communication, cognitive, & physical development
- Interests & preferences

Family Context

Learning Environment

Essential Outcomes

The Early Learning Program Curriculum is intended for use throughout the Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-olds, including the extended day and year programming.

> *Stacking blocks and mixing sand and water encourages logical-mathematical thinking, scientific reasoning and cognitive problem-solving ... the learning that occurs is a by-product of play.*
>
> *Paul Cappon, Canadian Council on Learning*[39]

Reflecting Aboriginal Peoples in Early Learning Environments

I visited and heard about many positive program models that have integrated Aboriginal culture and teachings to ensure a more holistic approach to early learning. The Coalition of Northern Ontario Educational Leaders has worked successfully to create the Oral Language Project aimed at Aboriginal children. The coalition has representatives from school boards and school authorities across northwestern Ontario, three postsecondary institutions, and the Ministry of Education.

The project arose out of concern for the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The Oral Language Project looks at how strong oral language skills and receptive language have an impact on literacy skills. Student success is grounded in strong individualized instruction, a supportive environment, and culturally sensitive practices. Training began with teachers in Junior and Senior Kindergarten. In 2009, Grade 1 teachers joined the learning journey. Their experience has influenced other schools to find ways to support their young learners. In an excellent example of sharing best practice, some southern Ontario school boards are adapting the program for their children.

How Is My Child Doing? Early Screening

Recommendations:

12. The Early Years Policy Framework should mandate municipal authorities to:

- establish a consistent early identification protocol that incorporates the Nipissing District Developmental Screens (NDDS) and the Continuum of Development in ELECT;
- consolidate responsibility for early identification and intervention services;
- develop partnerships with public health, school boards, and specialized agencies to facilitate individualized intervention plans for children.

As parents, we all want to know how our own child is doing. Is our baby reaching those developmental benchmarks, learning to crawl and walk and babble and talk? The goal is to catch problems in children well before they enter the Early Learning Program. In section 3.1, I described the role of the Best Start Child and Family Centres in providing early identification and intervention resources. The Best Start Child and Family Centres would be responsible for the assessment and development of individualized intervention plans for children with identified needs, plans that would follow children into the Early Learning Program and into the primary grades, as needed.

To get this right, along with integration of supports to families, Ontario needs a consistent approach to screening all children as early in life as possible. A consistent protocol would assist practitioners and serve as a conversation starter with parents to promote awareness.

The government has province-wide rights to the Nipissing District Developmental Screens (NDDS), making it widely available throughout communities in Ontario. The NDDS offers 13 screens that assess children's development at intervals between 1 month of age and 6 years. Information for parents about activities to promote development accompanies the screens. The NDDS is also included in the enhanced 18-month well-baby visit[40] now in development in Ontario. The visit would be a prime occasion to connect parents with Best Start Child and Family Centres and other community services.

Evaluating Complementary Programs

In the absence of a coherent system, multiple non-profit and commercial initiatives have produced curriculum materials, programs, and strategies to support early learning and children's transition to Kindergarten. Some are very compatible with ELECT and could be incorporated into the framework.[41] Others are not. Effective approaches are not packaged; they are embedded in professional development, reflect Ontario's diversity, and do not require ongoing payment as a condition of use. The Province can work with experts to determine how to incorporate best practice into ELECT. It should also write guidelines to inform educators, school boards, and municipal authorities about how to evaluate and choose curriculum enhancements.

Municipal authorities are in a good position to build the necessary links between and among public health, school boards, and specialized agencies to ensure that parents take advantage of the one-stop service model in the Best Start Child and Family Centre. Incorporating the NDDS and the Continuum of Development in ELECT into a consistent early identification protocol will enhance observation and documentation by educators. A further developmental check using the NDDS should be carried out at registration for the Early Learning Program.

Assessments of children at birth, at 18 months, and at registration for the full-day Early Learning Program will provide parents with good information about their child and complement the detailed portfolios of each child's progress in early years programming. The combined information will follow each child into Grade 1 to assist both parents and educators in supporting the child's ongoing development.

Parent Engagement Matters ... Very Much

I heard from well over a thousand parents during the development of this report. Whether affluent or poor, rural or urban, they were all equally interested in the development of their children and wanted the skills to contribute to their children's learning. We know that children do better in school when parents are involved in their education, know their educators, and keep track of what is happening in class. Research demonstrates that the most effective time to engage parents is when their children are young. Many parents read with their children from infancy, listen to music with them, and understand the importance of being a responsible partner with educators in child care and school. But many other parents are not engaged in these ways for various and different reasons. Some parents may face life obstacles that prevent active engagement. Some parents are disengaged due to other circumstances, however, and their active involvement in their child's learning needs to be a priority for the family.

As well, many educators know how to establish very strong partnerships with parents, but others do not. Joint responsibility between parents and educators is an important "difference maker" when it comes to the developmental progress of children. Outreach to parents can be informal, but some parents will need to be brought into the process through flexible program models that support a two-way partnership.

Children begin to develop an understanding of mathematics skills and concepts by working with concrete materials such as blocks and counters and filling different sized containers with sand or water. Recognizing patterns, classifying and ordering material, weighing and measuring objects, and putting objects into sequence are the foundations of mathematics.

Parenting skills can be further developed by building interactive links between a child's learning at home and learning at school. This requires mutual respect and regard on the part of parents and educators. It involves welcoming parents into programs and making sure their contribution is valued. It means appreciating parental influence on children's learning and fostering an exchange of "intelligence" between parent and educator about what will help the child to learn and develop.

Home Learning Environment Is Paramount

Researchers found that children's academic achievement is more influenced by the home learning environment during early childhood than by the parents' level of education. The findings suggest that achievement gaps can be reduced by regular participation in quality programming that helps make parents aware of how their children learn and gives them ideas and resources to support their children's development.[42]

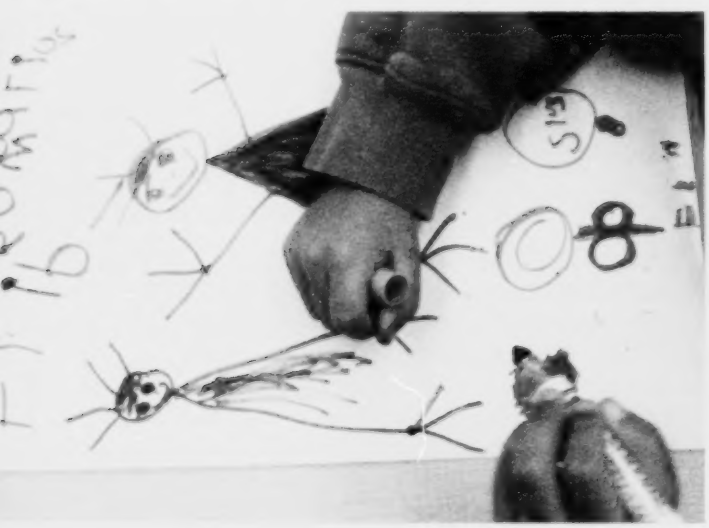
Creating partnerships is challenging when parents must be "buzzed" past locked doors to enter the school or when family resource centres, child care, and other activities are separated from the rest of the school by alarmed doors. In some schools, I saw signs that read "No parents or visitors past this point" or "Parents, please wait outside until the bell rings." I watched parents congregate on the sidewalk waiting for their children to be released, which limits opportunities for parent/educator conversation. As a parent, I appreciate that students and staff must feel supported in a safe teaching and learning environment. At the same time, schools and teachers must be accessible to parents. Principals and school administrators need to consider parental advice when creating safe schools.[43]

Extended hours of operation of community schools will provide more opportunities for more parents to visit the school on a regular basis. Strategies to improve school-parent engagement could include a review of school-family communications, policies on how long it takes to address a parent complaint, and ways to encourage new families to take part in school activities and mentor them as they participate.

Systematic mentoring is needed to help school leaders be aware of the barriers, adopt a keen interest in opening schools to all parents, and implement the best practices available in fostering respectful, reciprocal parent engagement. I had several experiences in low-income, very diverse school-based programs where the presence and involvement of parents were remarkable. I spent a summer morning in a Kindergarten orientation program with children and their families, mostly new immigrants, who were joyfully engaged in learning about learning, while becoming comfortable just being in the school, making it their school. I came across principals who went out into the community to draw parents into the school, always asking them how the school could do better, making a few feel valued enough to bring more of their friends into the school. It is not enough to say "our doors are open" if few walk through them.

If we want to be more inclusive with parents, we need to start with exclusion, listening carefully to those who feel on the outside looking in. Only by understanding what excludes parents can we begin to be effectively inclusive.

Parent/teacher, Toronto



Talking is important for literacy, for thinking, and for socializing with others. Children should be encouraged to share their experiences, to listen and ask questions. Language development is supported by reading and other forms of expression including drawing, painting, building, and writing.

Engaging Aboriginal Families

According to the Canadian Council on Learning report on literacy skills among Aboriginal people,[44] meaningful parent engagement must also include an active role in governance bodies. I studied the Aboriginal advisory bodies that some school boards have to inform a better and more respectful environment for Aboriginal children in the schools.

Reviews were mixed. One roundtable participant said: "This advisory council stuff is just window-dressing. The board would be better off and we would too if they created two permanent places on the board for Aboriginal leaders." On the other hand, an Aboriginal education leader remarked: "We are making excellent progress with our board ... They are committed with resources for curriculum, teacher training, and other gestures of genuine respect."

Parent engagement strategies must be effective at the school and classroom level. I visited a school that had an elder who spent his days in the school, sometimes just visiting with students, staff, and parents, sometimes working in classrooms telling stories and passing on Aboriginal teaching.

Young Aboriginal children must learn their own rich history, language, and culture. Is it possible to have an elder in every school? Family mobility deprives many children of the unique relationship grandparents can offer. The extension of parent involvement to include the wisdom and knowledge of grandparents is a promising practice from which all children can benefit.

If our goal is to increase parent engagement, we need to be thoughtful about who is included in the process. Many parents commented that existing policies on parent engagement in schools and early childhood programs did not give enough consideration to the splendid diversity in Ontario. Are we truly involving parents if some educators and school leaders, as I have been advised, avoid the Muslim mother because she wears a hijab or are confused about how to approach same-sex parents or the many configurations of blended families?

Educators need more direction in how to engage fathers more effectively in the development and education of children if early childhood programs are to keep pace with the realities of modern families. In more than a third of Canadian households, women are the primary wage earner. Our new child and family service system must encourage more fathers to get involved in their children's early learning. The parental leave policy being proposed will greatly assist in this regard.

The Importance of Family-Friendly Employment Policies and Practices

Many working parents across all income levels described the delicate and often frustrating challenges of balancing family and work responsibilities. Some recounted work settings in which employers are family sensitive and understand the returns – greater productivity and retention – that are part and parcel of family-friendly policies, including support for employees' involvement with their children's learning and school participation. Many parents painted quite a different picture. Shift and weekend work offers up extra challenges for parents, employers, and child care providers.

All parents want to raise their children in optimal conditions, but income, culture, and language can create barriers. Some families experience more challenges and may be isolated or marginalized due to their immigration status, homelessness, violence, addictions, or physical or emotional health problems. Additional effort has to be made to support and engage these parents. Locating Best Start Child and Family Centres in schools will help to link parents to the school, as well as to parenting, family counselling, and other supports.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education established a Provincial Parent Board whose primary responsibility is to advise the Minister on the development of effective parent engagement programs and supports at the provincial, school board, and local levels. While this advisory board may have the potential to make a difference, it is more important that attention be paid to regional and local efforts to drive parent engagement improvements.

3.3 Staffing for Success

All communities benefit from integrated [child and family] programs delivered by a diverse, knowledgeable, skilled workforce that contributes to the quality of daily life of young children and their families.

Best Start Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources[45]

Recommendations:

13. The Early Years Policy Framework should establish staffing for early learning environments as follows:

- The Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-old children should be staffed by teams of certified teachers and registered early childhood educators (ECEs). Local flexibility should be possible, but two "non-negotiable" essentials must always be included: educators skilled at applying child development knowledge and a strong and effective parent engagement strategy.
- The Extended Day Primary program for children from 6 to 8 years old should have one registered ECE for approximately 15 children.
- After-school programs should be led by staff knowledgeable about the developmental needs of children from 9 to 12 years old, and guided by current best practices in programming.
- Best Start Child and Family Centres should be staffed by registered ECEs and special needs resource teachers. Municipal authorities should establish appropriate staffing levels to meet programming needs. Day Nursery Act regulations currently governing child-staff ratios and age groupings should be reviewed and updated.

14. School boards should organize staffing to promote full-time employment for ECEs. ECEs should form a unique professional classification within school boards.

15. The Ontario College of Teachers should require all teachers who do not have early childhood knowledge to complete an early childhood Additional Qualification course (or equivalent experience) within five years in order to hold a position in the Early Learning Program.

The program quality that young children experience depends on educators who are far more than technicians implementing a prescribed set of activities driven by generic learning standards. Effective educators, and those who lead and mentor them, are reflective learners themselves who have a passion for the success of their learners and deep respect for their individual differences. Central to an effective early learning curriculum is an "emergent" approach that builds on a child's curiosity, intrinsic interests, and self-discovery.

I have witnessed many responsive Ontario educators who engage and motivate young children in experiences that nurture critical thinking, inquiry, literacy, and numeracy, and who show children how to get along with and learn from others. Such educators apply their knowledge about early development and learning to assess each child's individual development, drawing on the expertise of other professionals when needed. Other elements, such as group size, adult-child ratio, and supportive working conditions, influence how effective educators can be, but the evidence consistently shows that what matters most is whether a quality educator is with the children.

Educator Teams in the Early Learning Program

Premier McGuinty asked me to explore three staffing models for full-day early learning:

- all teachers (certified by the Ontario College of Teachers);

Effective educators, and those who lead and mentor them, are reflective learners themselves who have a passion for the success of their learners and deep respect for their individual differences.

- all early childhood educators (ECEs) (registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators);
- a blend of teachers and ECEs.

I thoroughly explored all three models and variations thereof and concluded that a blend of Kindergarten teachers and ECEs would work best for the Early Learning Program. The team was the choice of hundreds of parents and educators who shared their experience and expertise with me. The approach is grounded in successful experimentation in Ontario and elsewhere. Educator teams have been found to add to the strengths of the professional preparation and skill sets of both teachers and ECEs. Children benefit and staff satisfaction is enhanced. All Early Learning Program team members would be school board employees.

A Prince of a Program

I was so impressed by Le Petit Prince elementary school in the Vanier district of Ottawa that I went back a second time with the Ministers of Children and Youth and of Community and Social Services. Le Petit Prince provides a wonderful all-day learning experience for 4- and 5-year-old children and a remarkable partnership between a Kindergarten teacher and ECEs. There is an excellent working relationship with the municipality, which provides an outreach worker who connects with very low income parents in one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Canada. It is all led by a transformational leader-principal who drives positive change. The result? Happy young learners overcoming difficult obstacles, moving seamlessly to Grade 1, and going on to do very well on provincial Grade 3 tests.

In early learning environments of up to 20 children, the staff team would include a half time certified teacher, a full time registered ECE during traditional school hours, and another registered ECE for traditional school hours and for fee-based extended hours. This staffing complement would provide a seamless program for children whether they attend a half, full, or extended day.[46] It provides more individualized attention for children and more preparation and planning time for educators, and eliminates the need for part-time and split workdays. Flexibility for local school boards is possible, based on student numbers and decisions regarding combined or separate environments for 4- and 5-year-old children.

The two unassailable givens that must be part of any full-day learning program are educators with child development knowledge and skills, and an effective parent engagement strategy. A team approach, following the Early Learning Program Curriculum described in section 3.2, is essential.

In some current full-day learning school boards, the official school day begins at 8 a.m., removing the need for before-school programming.

Currently, certified primary school teachers may have acquired specific early childhood knowledge and skills through prior postsecondary education, in-service professional development, or early childhood Additional Qualification courses. These teachers would be qualified for the Early Learning Program. Others have acquired the equivalent knowledge and skills through experience and continuous learning opportunities. A rigorous process for prior learning assessment should be established to recognize equivalency.

Those without the above qualifications should complete an early childhood Additional Qualification course or its equivalent within five years to qualify as an educator in the Early Learning Program.

ECEs in the program would be registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators and hold an ECE degree or diploma. Forming a unique professional classification within school boards would support the professionalism of the sector.

The following diagram outlines the responsibilities of educators in the Early Learning Program.

Staffing for Extended Day Primary Program and Best Start Child and Family Centres

The qualification for teaching in the Extended Day Primary program for children from 6 to 8 years old should be an ECE degree or diploma. The consensus among researchers and practitioners is that one qualified adult to approximately 15 children provides the needed blend of adult-child interaction and self-directed activities appropriate for this age group in this type of setting. Educators should be school board employees. Boards will be able to create full-time positions for these educators by using their broad skill base to enhance a number of programs, such as early literacy, arts, and culture and recreation, and to provide support for children with special needs.

Early Learning Program Educator Responsibilities in the Half, Full, and Extended Day

Teacher:

- Evaluates children's developmental progress within the context of the Early Learning Program Curriculum expectations and provides summative reports to parents
- Prepares children for transition to the Grade 1 curriculum

Teacher & Early Childhood Educator:

- Plan and implement the Early Learning Program Curriculum
- Monitor children's developmental progress
- Communicate regularly with families
- Maintain healthy physical, emotional, and social learning environments

Early Childhood Educator:

- Implements extended day activities
- Plans and implements summer programming
- Liaises with community partners

ECEs and early childhood resource teachers in Best Start Child and Family Centres, under a municipal management system, would provide early learning, flexible child care, and family/child programs for children from infancy to their transition to the Early Learning Program around age 4.[47] They would provide family supports and partner with public health and early identification and intervention specialists as part of a comprehensive team. ECEs and early childhood resource teachers require working conditions that reflect their knowledge, skills, and responsibilities.

Appropriate staffing levels should be established for Best Start Child and Family Centres to meet the programming needs of the children and families using the program. Staffing and age groupings should reflect the trend to older infants in non-parental care and eliminate unnecessary transitions. For example, three ECEs would be appropriate for 12 children up to 2.5 years old (unless there are more than three infants under 12 months, which would require more staff), three ECEs for 25 children aged from 2 to 4 years, or three ECEs for a mixed-age grouping of up to 18 children.

Preparing the Early Years Workforce

Recommendations:

16. To support the development of the early childhood workforce, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, in consultation with the Minister of Education, should:

- refocus ECE diploma programs on children from 0 to 8 years old;
- establish an early childhood specialty degree program focusing on children from 0 to 8 years old;
- encourage French-language postsecondary institutions to increase the number of francophone ECEs, and intervention and family support professionals;
- encourage postsecondary institutions to recruit students and education faculty reflective of the gender, race, and ethnicity needed in the early childhood workforce;
- encourage postsecondary institutions to recruit Aboriginal students to become educators in early years programs;
- require ECE diploma and early childhood specialty degree programs to apply transparent, accessible prior learning assessment and recognition processes;
- ensure that ECE apprenticeship training is aligned with the Ontario Program Standard for the ECE diploma;
- fund postsecondary programs to expand bridging programs into ECE diploma and teacher education degree programs specifically designed to fast-track people with out-of-country credentials.

17. The Early Years Division should support the development of management tools and establish a province-wide in-service training plan to assist school board and municipal managers, school principals, and centre directors in the establishment and operations of the Early Learning Program, Extended Day Primary program, and Best Start Child and Family Centres.

Leaders and Coaches

Leadership and coaching in community schools and Best Start Child and Family Centres must encourage responsiveness, organization, and planned curriculum. Successful implementation of the new system and its ongoing quality and improvement will depend on them. Principals will be responsible for the oversight of the Early Learning Program and after-school programming. Research has established that their role is critical to changing school culture.[48]

School boards should have early years coordinator positions to support principals and educators. The number of these coordinators may vary from board to board. In some school districts, the functions of the early years coordinator and literacy and numeracy specialist positions currently in the system might be combined.

Best Start Child and Family Centres will require educational leadership and operational management. Municipal authorities should have child and family consultants to coach and mentor staff teams and ensure program effectiveness and accountability. Existing positions and resources that now support the provisions of the Day Nurseries Act, family literacy initiatives, Ontario Early Years Centres, and the municipal administration of the child care system can be repositioned to provide continuous learning opportunities and best practice in Best Start Child and Family Centres.

Effective postsecondary programs for educators and early childhood Additional Qualification courses must include specific content on early child development, curriculum, and pedagogy; early identification and intervention; parent engagement and family outreach; anti-oppression (relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability) practices; and dual language learning.

> ***Let's face it. We're not doing well enough preparing teachers for early education and we need to take this opportunity to get on with it.***
>
> *Julia O'Sullivan, Dean of Education, University of Western Ontario*

In the short term, Early Learning Program teachers would have a combination of existing ECE diplomas and degrees and primary/junior teacher education degrees supplemented by early childhood Additional Qualification courses. Directors in Best Start Child and Family Centres should have an ECE or related degree. Moving forward, a specialty degree in early childhood should be the required qualification for Early Learning Program teachers, directors in Best Start Child and Family Centres, and early childhood resource teachers. The specialty will provide the core knowledge and skills necessary for working with children from 0 to 8 years old. The concept was recommended by practitioners and postsecondary educators.

Universities and community colleges can collaborate to build on the foundation of current ECE and teacher education programs to create and deliver the preparatory program.[49]

Lab centres operated by postsecondary institutions are essential to the preparation of the early childhood workforce and can test resources and explore best practices. Existing lab centres could be converted into model Best Start Child and Family Centres, and training institutions should partner with local school boards to develop model placement opportunities for their students in Early Learning and Extended Day Primary programs.

The ECE two-year diploma is an appropriate credential for entry to practice for ECEs in Best Start Child and Family Centres, the Early Learning Program, and the Extended Day Primary program. However, the curriculum for this diploma has a focus on children from 0 to 12 years old. This focus should shift to children from 0 to 8 years old. ECE diploma graduates should be eligible for articulation into the early childhood degree program.

The Ontario College of Teachers and the College of Early Childhood Educators may wish to consider amalgamation of their two organizations and their respective regulatory functions as the number of educators with the early childhood specialty qualification grows. Until a merger occurs, both regulatory bodies should recognize the new degree.

Particularly during the transition to a new integrated child and family service system, a combination of individual and team in-service professional development is needed. A province-wide in-service training plan for educators should be developed.

Aboriginal Educators and Aboriginal History in Education

We need more Aboriginal educators and more non-Aboriginal educators who understand and value Aboriginal history, culture, and traditions. Making assumptions about Aboriginal people and their children without understanding the colonial and residential school history leads some non-Aboriginal educators to make false assumptions about the learning capacity of an entire community. This is not about one more workshop on Aboriginal children. It is about a fundamental shift in pedagogy and curriculum at all levels. We must also improve the accessibility and design of educator preparation programs. To spread best practices, links need to be strengthened between postsecondary institutions that have Aboriginal education programs and institutions that do not.

The need for more trained Aboriginal educators is essential. We do not have to create anything new but, to attract and retain Aboriginal students in postsecondary institutions, we must do more than establish one position that liaises with Aboriginal students. Postsecondary institutions should facilitate the gathering of Aboriginal students to build a community within the institution.[50]

Preparing the early childhood workforce requires attention to issues of equity and accessibility. Postsecondary institutions should do more to recruit students who reflect the equity in gender, race, and ethnicity needed in our workforce of early learning educators and those who train them.

A menu of options that makes professional education more accessible could include multiple entry points to postsecondary programs, recognition of professional learning outside of formal postsecondary programs (prior learning assessment), apprenticeship programs that are aligned with postsecondary institutions, and use of electronic technology in distance education programs. Embedding in-service professional development in practice is also essential.

Team Professional Development

It is critical that in-service and pre-service development strategies focus on the team, that teachers and ECEs learn together how to create something larger than their important respective contributions, and that they know how to engage in respectful, reciprocal mentoring, always with their learners in mind.

The ECE apprenticeship program in Ontario broadens access to many individuals who are working in early childhood settings without ECE qualifications. The content of the apprenticeship program must provide graduates with an ECE diploma and eligibility for registration in the College of Early Childhood Educators.

3.4 Program and System Monitoring

Recommendations:

18. The Early Years Division should:

- build on existing information sources to develop and implement a consolidated integrated accountability mechanism, the Early Years Index, focused on the systems monitoring of inputs, measurable outcomes, and transparent public reporting. The index would include a standard program evaluation tool that links the developmental outcomes in ELECT and the operation of Best Start Child and Family Centres, Early Learning Programs, and Extended Day Primary programs;
- provide mechanisms to foster learning and expertise by promoting the exchange of best practices and staff knowledge about how outcomes are measured and how the information can be used to improve performance.

As parents, members of the community, and taxpayers, we want to know whether those new programs are working. Are more Ontario children arriving in Grade 1 with the social, emotional, and cognitive skills necessary to succeed? Are special needs being identified effectively?

Accounting to Aboriginal Families

Perhaps the most significant step forward towards beginning the process of building early years services for Aboriginal children and their families is the increased level of dialogue and consultation emerging from planning for the Best Start initiative. Open, honest and ongoing discussion about both the needs and the capacities of the Aboriginal community is the first step in working collaboratively and effectively to begin to identify together what can be achieved.

2007–2008 Best Start Community Plan, Region of Peel

The challenges that hinder progress for Aboriginal children and their families are extraordinary, but there are many examples illustrating that Aboriginal communities are making progress. The Ontario government recognizes that just over 50 per cent of Aboriginal children are living in poverty, and its Poverty Reduction Strategy includes new programs for Aboriginal youth. While the federal government must play a far more effective role, the provincial government should ensure that initiatives dealing with Aboriginal children are horizontally connected across government and integrated and driven by a single authority.

The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework is intended to provide strategic policy direction to the Ministry of Education and local school boards to improve the academic achievement of Aboriginal students who attend provincially funded schools.[51]

The long-term goal of the framework is to improve literacy and numeracy skills, and increase graduation rates and advancement to postsecondary studies. In a short time, some meaningful progress has occurred. Sixty school boards have passed, or are in the process of passing, a policy regarding voluntary and confidential self-identification of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, with the support of local Aboriginal organizations. This is critical in terms of determining appropriate resources, such as more Aboriginal educators. The process of dealing with this issue has created more capacity, awareness, and understanding in many of these boards.

While much more needs to be done, according to many Aboriginal leaders with whom I spoke, this framework is an excellent building block for progress in early learning for Aboriginal children. Further development of the framework should be informed by the early learning lens provided by this report.

To achieve positive results for children, we must systematically monitor resources, access, quality of programs, and outcomes along the way. Effective accountability means we need to know whether programs are helpful. Program and system evaluation requires gathering data on a population basis – putting together the results of all the children in a neighbourhood or a school to see how they are doing.

I concur with the recent report of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review, which urges a new accountability mechanism to replace the current focus on compliance, process, and the counting of inputs with one that measures results.[52] Accounting for the number of children attending this or that program provides no assurance to either families or the public that children's lives are improving or whether the service is cost-effective.

The Early Years Index that I am proposing would track access, program effectiveness, resources, and outcomes. It will draw on assessment tools already in use and introduce new measures where necessary. A consistently applied, collaboratively established, province-wide reporting format will provide Ontario with a comprehensive assessment of how children and families are doing, at the provincial, regional, and neighbourhood level. Knowing where children are, how they are doing and why, and what types of interventions can make a difference in their lives allows governments to set targets for improvements and measure progress. The index will give confidence to communities about the progress of their children, knowledge to educators and program managers about how to improve practice, and information to provincial and local governments and the citizens they serve about returns on investment.

The Early Years Index should evaluate what goes into early childhood services, such as:

- resources – annual service costs per child, levels of investments in children's services per child in the community, and numbers of children receiving fee support;
- access – what families are using which services and how;
- quality – a common set of program evaluation criteria.

The index should track results for children and families, using such indicators as:

Children have a natural creativity and a need to make sense of their world. Through visual arts, music, drama, and dance, they learn about their own and other people's culture.

- birth measures, the enhanced 18-month well-baby visit, and Early Learning Program registration measures;
- the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and the Kindergarten Parent Survey;
- Middle-Years Development Instrument data (under development);
- school achievement as measured by Grade 3 and Grade 6 academic assessments of the independent Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO);
- well-being indicators for 12-year-olds;
- the number of parents able to work because of the availability of affordable care;
- the proportion of children living in poverty in the community.

Program evaluation criteria should link the practice guidelines in ELECT and the operation of Best Start Child and Family Centres, the Early Learning Program, and the Extended Day Primary program.

The internationally recognized EDI, developed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University, should form an important part of the Early Years Index. The EDI uses data collected by a teacher in the latter half of Senior Kindergarten, using a tool that measures each child's development in five areas: emotional maturity, social competence, physical health and well-being, language and cognition, and communication and general knowledge. The results are aggregated to provide a snapshot of how well prepared children are for school in a defined neighbourhood.

EDI findings are most effective when linked to other measures, such as the social and economic status of the community; the availability of children's programs, libraries, community centres, and playgrounds; and health, crime, or employment statistics. By tracking over time, governments, schools, and agencies can evaluate the impact of their programs on children's well-being. A change such as the closing of a school, business, or community centre or a cut in child care fee subsidies can be measured in falling EDI scores – an indication that more children are vulnerable.

In Ontario, the EDI is implemented on a three-year cycle. The Offord Centre works with school boards and local data analyst coordinators to analyze information and provide community-, school-, and board-level reports. Currently, there is no uniformity in how results are reported in local communities or who receives the reports. A consistently applied reporting framework and the data analyst coordinators could be used by municipal authorities, in conjunction with public health units, school boards, community partners, the Offord Centre, and other academic research centres, to facilitate service planning and support accountability. EDI and EQAO[53] data can be linked at the school or neighbourhood level to allow communities to have EDI information along with information at Grade 3 and 6 in one report.

Linking Up Data

Manitoba and British Columbia are working towards linking information about children's status at birth, in early childhood, and at school entry to school performance and high school completion. This is a promising practice that Ontario should explore. Consolidating these data tells us what is happening to defined populations of children throughout childhood. It allows for comparisons between groups of children and can pinpoint when problems

appear and how effective interventions are. With this system in place we could, for example, compare Grade 3 school assessments for children who attended the Early Learning Program and Best Start Child and Family Centres with those of children who did not.

The chart below demonstrates how linked data provide a more complete picture of how children are doing in British Columbia. Column B shows the percentage of children who wrote and failed the standardized test, but when the percentage of children who did not take the test is added, the results are much more revealing. The percentage who did not pass almost doubles.

Being able to link different data sets longitudinally allows for more accurate analysis. This example from British Columbia shows that vulnerability at school entry is closely tied to poor school performance. The greater the number of vulnerabilities indicated by EDI assessments of Kindergarten children, the less likely they are to participate in Grade 4 province-wide testing and the more likely they are to perform below expectations.

Linking children's information to other social, economic, and health data is an essential accountability mechanism, providing information to schools, Best Start Child and Family Centres, municipal authorities, and school boards to support service planning, monitor progress, spur improvement, provide public information, and inform resource use. In addition, researchers could use this mechanism for evaluation purposes.

Accountable leadership for developing the Early Years Index should be established, and the process should begin with a detailed analysis of current Ontario government ministries' work on tracking children's indicators and best practices in Canada and elsewhere, paying particular attention to issues related to consent; identification of the specific purposes to which the information will be put; who will be accountable for the information; and, ultimately, how the protection of each child's personal information will be assured. Existing information and mechanisms could be used as a starting point to develop data-sharing agreements and audit requirements in consultation with key ministries, the Offord Centre, the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, the EQAO, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, and other academic and research centres.

The Cost of Vulnerability: % of Children with EDI Scores "Not Passing" Grade 4 Standardized Assessments in B.C.[54]

A: # of EDI* vulnerabilities showing at school entry	B: % of children failing to meet expectations in Grade 4	C: % "Not Passing" (Column B plus children that did not write the test)
	Results of Provincial Numeracy Assessment	
0	7.5	12.3
1	11.8	22.2
2 - 3	18.7	33.8
4 - 5	27.5	55.6
	Results of Provincial Reading Assessment	
0	13.6	17.8
1	26.7	33.9
2 - 3	29.5	43.1
4 - 5	48.4	68.3

* EDI assesses children in 5 broad areas: emotional maturity, social competence, physical health and well-being, language and cognition, and communication and general knowledge.

Chapter 4

Funding Our Best Future

Full day learning for four and five-year olds should be part of a comprehensive early childhood education and child care system in Ontario. [We must:]

- *Allocate permanent base funding to support a comprehensive early learning and child care system that is accountable, sustainable and flexible*
- *Allocate sustainable funds to mitigate any financial impact upon the current child care system.*

Regional Municipality of Niagara, March 2009

Recommendations:

19. The Province should:

- adopt a three-year time frame, beginning in September 2010, to implement a two-year full (school) day Early Learning Program prior to Grade 1, for every child who turns 4 by December 31;
- provide sufficient funding for operations and staffing levels for the Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-olds to support the recommendations in this report;
- allocate equitably across all regions and school boards, including boards that now offer full-day learning;
- provide sufficient funding to school boards to cover occupancy and related costs for the operation of extended day/year programming for children from 4 to 12 years old;
- modify child care fee subsidy eligibility to facilitate flexible enrolment options and remove parents' work requirement for eligibility so that more children can benefit, especially the most disadvantaged children;
- maintain the current 75 per cent target for French-language elementary schools to have French-language programs for 0- to 3-year-olds by 2011–12;
- transfer to municipal authorities funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres in a single envelope that includes all existing transfers for programs/resources that will be consolidated under Best Start Child and Family Centres, resources associated with regulation and oversight, plus all child care savings generated from implementation of the Early Learning Program;
- negotiate transitional funding, as necessary, to support program reorganization through Early Years Service Plans;
- secure continued support for Best Start child care spaces now funded by the federal government;
- undertake immediate discussions with the federal government to ensure children of First Nations are not disadvantaged by the implementation of full-day learning.

The introduction of full-day learning and the reorganization and consolidation of services create cost-efficiencies to allow a more affordable parent fee for extended day participation.

Estimating Capital Costs

To make room for full-day early learning and Best Start Child and Family Centres, a number of elementary schools will require renovations. We have a good start. About 1,500, or more than one-third, of Ontario's 4,000 elementary schools could accommodate full-day learning with no or minor modifications. Funding has already been allocated for full-day learning in most new school construction both planned and in development.

The remaining schools would require capital support as follows:[55]

- new purpose-built classrooms for full-day learning: approximately 2,500 classrooms in 1,400 schools
- renovation of approximately 1,200 surplus classrooms in 950 schools
- renovation of approximately 1,100 classrooms in 780 schools used for Kindergarten but not purpose built

My best estimate of capital costs would be an annualized cost of about $130 million.[56] Ongoing review by the provincial government will be required.

To reduce costs, service planning should factor in surplus capacity in surrounding schools, not just in individual schools. Taking a family of schools approach (e.g., revising school boundaries and shared/transferred space between boards) would significantly decrease construction costs.

Space in schools used by Parenting and Family Literacy Centres or purpose-built, renovated, or leased space now used by child care or other family programs is not included in the calculations. It is essential that this space be protected for the continued operation of early years programming and the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres. The estimates also reserve space for special school programming.[57]

With a proposed three-year implementation time frame for the full-day Early Learning Program:

- year 1 could include newly opened schools and those able to utilize existing space (approximately 35% of schools) and include some attention to low-income neighborhoods;
- year 2 could include newly opened schools and renovated surplus classrooms (approximately 30% of schools);
- year 3 could include newly opened schools, new classroom construction, and the renovation of rooms currently used for 4- and 5-year-olds (remaining 35% of schools).

While construction may lag behind the demand for space in schools in which to deliver full-day learning, community service planning can apply ingenuity to secure temporary, shared, and off-site space to accommodate need.

Estimating the Resources Required for Full-Day Learning

I estimate that the incremental staffing and operational costs (facilities maintenance, administrative overhead, program materials, language and special needs supports, and transportation) of the Early Learning Program at full implementation would range from $790 million to $990 million.

Estimated Cost for Full-Day Learning

Operating	$360–$560 million
Staffing	$430 million
Total	**$790–$990 million**

Note: These preliminary estimates will require ongoing review by the provincial government.[58]

Parent Fees – Savings for Ontario Families

The introduction of full-day learning and the reorganization and consolidation of services create cost-efficiencies to allow a more affordable parent fee for additional extended day requirements if needed. Parents who now use full-time licensed child care can expect significant savings.

Under the new system, fees for 4- and 5-year-old children attending full-year, extended day programming would average $6,750 annually ($27/day). For children from 6 to 8 years old attending the year-round Extended Day Primary program, the cost would be $5,200 annually ($20/day). The differential reflects the variation in staffing requirements for younger and older children. The after-tax cost[59] to parents would be about $5,000 per child, or about 13 per cent of the net income of a family earning the provincial median pre-tax wage of $55,723. Details are provided in the endnotes.[60] Child care fee subsidies will remain essential for low-income families.

UNICEF sets 10 per cent to 15 per cent of net family income as an affordability benchmark for how much parents should pay for child care. Full-day learning would help most parents reach that benchmark. This would represent a significant achievement for Ontario.

Costs have been calculated on programs operating 11 hours per day, 50 weeks per year.

School boards would cover (already built into the costing noted earlier):

- full-year occupancy costs;
- professional development;
- staffing and supervision costs during the school day/year;
- administration;
- program costs during the school year.

Parent fees would cover:

- lunch and snacks;
- extended day/year staffing and supervision costs;
- program costs for the summer program.

Municipal authorities would continue to administer the fee subsidy program. Eligibility for fee subsidies should be modified to facilitate flexible enrolment options and should not be tied to parents' labour force participation, thus allowing more children an opportunity to participate. This would also support the government's poverty reduction goals.

Eligibility for fee subsidies should be modified to facilitate flexible enrolment options and should not be tied to parents' labour force participation, thus allowing more children an opportunity to participate. This would also support the government's poverty reduction goals.

Funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres

Funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres will largely be found in the re-engineering and consolidation of existing programs and resources. Municipal authorities would maintain their current contribution levels. Provincial funds should be transferred to municipal authorities in a single, consolidated envelope and include all existing transfers plus:

- all child care savings generated from the implementation of the Early Learning Program;[61]
- all public transfers/resources from other programs transferred to municipal authorities to create the Best Start Child and Family Centres;
- resources associated with regulation and oversight.

Funding sustainability must include:

- a consistent, stable, and indexed, multi-year funding envelope based on an equitable formula that reflects the local costs of child and family services;
- appropriate capital funding to meet local needs.

Federal funding that now supports Best Start child care spaces is scheduled to end in early 2010. This support needs to be maintained as part of the effective implementation of full-day learning. The Province should make it clear to its municipal partners that it will secure continued support from the federal government for the original Best Start funding base or replace federal funding with provincial resources to ensure stability.

Some additional transition funding may be required to make the journey from service fragmentation to a child and family service system a success. Program reorganization will involve adjustments in labour and resource transfers. Transitional funding should be negotiated as part of Early Years Service Plans and multi-year service agreements. Once implementation targets have been reached, funds would roll into children-related budgets of municipal authorities to support expanded access to Best Start Child and Family Centres. When services are organized to reflect what families want and need, we will also have a better idea about the levels of new investment required for expansion.

Aboriginal Funding

The federal government is financially responsible for the education of First Nations people residing on reserve. Aboriginal leaders and practitioners were clear that they expect the federal government to ensure that what Ontario provides to "its people" should have an "equal but different expression on reserve". But Aboriginal leaders point to the outdated Band Operated Funding Formula that will not provide the funding necessary to undertake renovations, school additions, or replacements necessary to accommodate full-day learning in on-reserve schools.

Aboriginal leaders remain deeply frustrated with federal-provincial jurisdictional squabbling that they believe is too often a proxy for intentional or unintentional inaction and are adamant and "skeptical that the federal government will live up to its obligations". In this regard, it is critical that Ontario continue to press the federal government to provide adequate levels of funding for First Nations education.

Full-day learning could also have a negative financial impact on First Nations with their school board invoicing for children going to off-reserve schools. First Nations are concerned that full-day learning may result in tuition arrears. Grants for Student Needs grow annually, while reimbursement from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has not kept pace. Some school boards reserve the right to deny students attendance at their schools if the First Nation from which students come falls into arrears. First Nations leaders are alarmed by any situation that may deny children the right to attend school. It is essential that these concerns be addressed prior to the implementation of full-day learning.

Recognizing the Pioneers

For the past decade, French-language boards have prioritized their funding to offer full-time programming to 13,500 4- and 5-year-olds. Seventeen English-language school boards chose to use their grants to extend full-day, everyday programming to some of their schools. This achievement should be recognized, and boards that have led the way should not be penalized financially.

During year 1 of implementation, boards with full-day learning should meet the programming benchmarks laid out in this report. Subsequent funding should be used to expand the Early Learning Program into schools that do not have it. After a school board has fully implemented the Early Learning Program, it should be allowed to use any additional early learning allocations to restore resources channelled from other programs.

The Ministry of Education's goal of child care for children from 0 to 3 years old in 75 per cent of French-language schools deserves support. It is fully consistent with the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres outlined in this report. The ministry should continue its negotiations with the federal Official Languages in Education Program to cover the capital costs. Consideration should first be given to communities with the greatest need for French-language supports.

Chapter 5

From Words to Action

Learning is the work. Professional development in workshops and courses is only an input to continuous learning. Successful growth is accomplished when the culture of the school supports the day-to-day learning of teachers and early childhood educators engaged in improving what they do.

Michael Fullan[62]

Recommendations:

20. **Beginning in 2012, the Province should coordinate a process with key ministries to modernize legislation that would produce a new Education and Family Supports Act that would:**
    - enable the outcomes noted in this report;
    - reduce redundancies;
    - eliminate outdated elements in various pieces of legislation and develop a single integrated piece of legislation.

Removing the Obstacles

So many of the people I met asked why it has taken so long to get our act together for our youngest children. I do not have an answer, but I heard a lot of theories during my consultations. Here are a few. The labels are mine, but the quotes belong to some of those who provided input and represent the views of many others.

Fuzzy governance: "No one organization at Queen's Park or in the community is responsible for driving change; process is important but without accountable leadership, it's a pathway to nowhere."

Hardening of the categories: "Too many cross-purpose legislative silos result in time spent filling out multiple budget forms, spending less time on service and preventing some key changes that would better serve kids and their parents."

The obstacle of tradition: "While many in my community are sincerely dedicated to improving coordination of services, they are hampered by their own traditions. The Best Start table is a forum to keep an eye on each other, defend turf, and prevent anything more than marginal changes."

Short-termism: "Perhaps the problem is the tendency to deal with complexity too simply in electoral time frames that do not allow for the longer term implementation intricacies to be worked out. This often creates the potential for key policy fields, like education and health care, to become political footballs. We need a non-partisan approach for doing the right things for a change."

Resources for a change: "More money is nice but it is not the fundamental barrier if existing resources are not used effectively. Needed is some transition money with incentives to change the way business is done."

We are at a crossroads, but we have an opportunity to make the right choices.

It is time to move from words to action – implementing full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-old children and beginning the process of transforming our patchwork of service delivery into an integrated system. It is time to close the divide between education and care. We must summon the leadership within the provincial government, school boards and municipal authorities, and among community organizations to create the changes that will make a difference in the lives of Ontario's children and families.

We have a clear vision to guide our way, one that can steer us along a new pathway of progress and success. We have more understanding of the obstacles in the way and the signposts to help us stay on track or get back on track when we waver a bit. There is much to do, many little and big decisions to make. Each and every one of us – parents, practitioners, public servants – must be guided by a simple question: What's best for children and their families?

Too many great ideas gather dust because of haphazard implementation. Success depends on an unrelenting focus on results and the ongoing development of, and effective partnering among, those leading change – from the educator and parent working hand in hand with each child in mind, to those leading the educators and those training them, to those leading provincial and community systems development.

We must learn from each other. There are excellent examples of critical elements of the new system across this province – teachers and ECEs working together, school-

based child care and family supports, school leaders who know how to engage parents and embrace diversity, and community partners who know how to truly collaborate. The challenge is to learn from best practice and make it common practice, and then to keep inventing new best practices and spreading the word ... and actions.

Experts and practitioners across Ontario are ready to embrace the changes that are necessary. They will create the "lighthouse" early learning environments, modelling best practices from which others will learn. But not everyone will be ready for change. That is why we need to create momentum and cultural transformation forged by early success. And incentives must be built into the implementation process that reward doing the right things well.

One of the biggest obstacles to effective change is inertia informed by previous experience with failed implementation. As well, inattention to the little things that matter, such as release time for key leaders, can stall the process. Involving people ready and qualified to implement at the outset is imperative, as is proceeding quickly with in-service training. Implementation should not be too far ahead of capacity ... if at all.

While I see some recommendations being implemented on a longer timeline than others, that does not mean I consider them less important. I want to make sure that implementation proceeds in a timely way, but I understand that change like this is complex, requiring consideration of many important issues.

I have heard from people all over the province that getting this early learning program right is more important than getting it done too quickly. If it is to be sustainable for generations to come, quality needs to trump speed. That said, I believe that the timetable I have set out, while challenging, is doable.

Perfection will not be around the corner. Implementation at times will be as messy as a child's first attempt at fingerpainting. With all of the significant gains made, mistakes need to foster learning. The desire for immediate perfection should not get in the way of focusing on the essentials, celebrating early success, and deliberately building a remarkable springboard for our collective future.

As always, the work of improving practice on the ground is never-ending.

Phase 1 Implementation: Local Success Criteria

Implementation is scheduled to begin in school year 2010–11. Most of the full-day learning components should be in place across Ontario at the end of three years (2012–13). Phase 1 is the first year of implementation. It is critical that implementation get off on the right foot and that we set ourselves up for success to create momentum for positive results. Critical success factors should be present at the start:

Planning: development of Early Years Service Plans, co-determined and co-signed by local partners and the Province;

Leadership: the track record of accomplishments of the principal regarding implementing positive and effective change; partnership skills within the school that creates a "whole school commitment" to innovation and change; an effective parent engagement strategy in place; passion for seeking and using sound information for improvement; in sum, Phase 1 schools should have stable, willing, and effective leadership and a board guarantee regarding leadership stability;

Early child development/learning capacity: the skill set and knowledge base of those who will enable the children's learning; teachers and ECEs with excellent child development knowledge, skills, and experience already in place; passion for diversity; use of board-wide coaching; opportunities to consolidate new initiatives with existing resources such as literacy and numeracy personnel within schools/boards;

Learning environment: appropriate and supportive space, as per early learning guidelines, with appropriate curriculum material, appropriate learning stations, and food preparation capability available;

Best Start Child and Family Centres: appropriate space and partnerships to support the development of integrated child and family services, including child care for children up to 4 years old;

Children's services: effective connectivity with community services and a track record in responding to special needs children in a timely and effective manner;

Getting ready: detailed plans for in-service preparation of educators regarding use of curriculum; parental engagement to encourage parents' participation and determine their preferences for enrolling their children; other details required to ensure smooth implementation; plans for schools for each subsequent phase, and communication plans to ensure transparent knowledge for parents regarding "when is this coming to my neighborhood?"; "getting ready for Phase 2" plans that would include partial release of a key point person for Phase 2 schools to work with and learn from Phase 1 schools; capital plans.

Service plans for Phase 1 must also consider, describe, and document other important elements such as:

- plans to include a portion of high-risk, low-income neighborhoods, with special initiatives to reach out to vulnerable families;
- special initiatives/needs for rural and remote areas;
- plans for non-school-based programming under the auspices of schools;
- special initiatives for Aboriginal children;
- special supports for children with special needs.

Specific documentation of effective collaboration and communications plans that involve all key community partners in development of these plans is central to implementation.

The benefits of full-day learning will accrue not just to individuals, but to all as we develop our human capital for a more prosperous economy and our social capital for a more inclusive and respectful society.

ASAP: Provincial Readiness

There are some very important items to consider acting on as soon as possible to enable implementation to begin in 2010.

The Deputy Minister of Education should be directed to develop and establish the Early Years Division as a first step to readiness. The new Early Years Division would initiate, facilitate, and monitor the development of an integrated child and family service system for Ontario, working with school boards, municipal authorities, communities, and other government ministries and departments.

The Early Years Division should:

- send out a memorandum to municipal authorities, school boards, and appropriate agencies that initiates the planning process;
- develop and implement a plan to draft, consult on, and finalize the Early Years Policy Framework;
- develop and implement a plan to finalize the Early Learning Program Curriculum;
- establish a regularly updated "best practice inventory" that enables practitioners and change leaders throughout Ontario to learn together from the creative and effective strategies that exist now and will continue to evolve.

The Province should communicate to municipalities its intention to secure the Best Start resources the federal government has indicated it will discontinue in March 2010.

With the assistance of the Special Advisor on Early Learning, an implementation reference group, comprising practitioners and other "on the ground" leaders, should be formed to provide advice on major aspects of implementation, such as identifying and removing barriers, professional development strategies, consolidated funding, and an accountable process that will inform the development of the Early Years Policy Framework.

Until new legislation is in place, implementation would be guided by the Early Years Policy Framework, the policy and funding authority that would outline the goals, mandate, mechanisms, timelines, targets, and accountability benchmarks and establish quality standards in Best Start Child and Family Centres and extended programming offered by school boards.

Legislating for a Change

A holistic, comprehensive, and integrated approach to supporting the learning and care of young children and their families is necessary if we are to reap the benefits of this important investment in our future.

Many community practitioners and local public servants noted the problems associated with multiple pieces of legislation that are either outdated or incompatible in enabling the kind of consistent support for children and families that is necessary. In the short run, as implementation rolls out, short-term legislative tools should be used. For example, certain aspects of the Day Nurseries Act and the Education Act may need to be addressed to enable implementation of this new initiative.

Beginning in 2012–13, the Province should undertake the process of developing a new Education and Family Supports Act. I anticipate that the consultative process to write new legislation would coincide with the third year of implementation of the child and family service system so that the "doing" and implementation experience can provide some excellent ideas for developing and refining the legislation.

Implementation Timeline

The recommendations in this report outline a specific implementation timeline and critical path that acknowledges the need to phase in change, build capacity, and build up resources. Implementation should proceed at a predictable and manageable pace, with quality as the main driver. While I fully understand the complexities of assuring quality programming and services throughout the

province, timing goals, however ambitious, need to drive implementation.

I propose implementing the following within three years (by the end of 2012–13):

- Provide the full-day Early Learning Program for all of Ontario's 4- and 5-year-old children, including extended day/year options for parents.
- Vest accountability for system change in an Early Years Division in the Ministry of Education.
- Create an Early Years Policy Framework for a coherent, comprehensive, and accountable child and family service system.
- Establish ELECT and the Continuum of Development as the curriculum and pedagogical framework for all early childhood settings and develop a province-wide training plan to support their use.
- Improve parent engagement strategies in all schools.
- Mandate municipal authorities to consolidate and re-engineer child/family programs and child care for children up to age 4 into Best Start Child and Family Centres.
- Allocate sufficient funding to support the strategy.

Within five years (by the end of school year 2014–15):

- Require all teachers holding a position in the Early Learning Program to have an early childhood Additional Qualification or its equivalent.
- Refocus ECE diploma programs on children from 0 to 8 years old.
- Re-engineer and consolidate special needs resources under Best Start Child and Family Centres, consolidating the school as a community hub concept.
- Introduce a new Education and Family Supports Act.

In years 5 to 10 (by 2020):

- Expand parental leave.
- Make available a new early childhood specialty degree.

From the beginning ... and forever:

- Build on universal screening opportunities to support children's development.
- Drive continuous improvement through comprehensive and coordinated data collection, analysis, and public reporting.
- Promote ongoing development of early learning leaders.

If Not Now, When?

The question is no longer if we should help prepare children for school and life beyond school, but how.

This is all about getting kids ready for school and schools getting ready for kids. It is about an approach to integrated community supports for children and families that acknowledges that while it takes a village to raise a child, we need our "villages" to be more effective in raising children.

We need to build on the best of what we have now and reposition existing resources. We must provide sound information at all levels to let parents know how their children are doing and help practitioners improve practice. We must inform taxpayers about the value of this effort, and keep them informed about how implementation is going.

With a clear direction set by the government, a citizenry that is strongly behind this initiative, many building blocks in place, and overwhelming evidence regarding the importance of investment in early learning, the question is if not now, when?

Establishing a strong foundation in the early years, and building on it, is the single most powerful factor in Ontario's social and economic future. It would be short-sighted folly not to maximize the opportunity before us.

Ontario has the vision and the talent to do something very special, something sustainable and long-lasting for its children and families, something that will inspire those who live in other places to take note, as we move from words to action with our best future in mind.

Acknowledging the "We" of Authorship

This report has thousands of "fingerprints" all over it. I am fortunate to have been a conduit and a bit of a filter for the many ideas of so many helpful and thoughtful individuals and organizations in and beyond Ontario.

Over a thousand parent submissions and discussions revealed the varied realities of families in our wonderfully diverse province.

Meetings with organizations representing teachers, ECEs, education administrators, postsecondary educators, researchers, and others provided an essential window into the world of practitioners.

I have a real human fear of omitting gratitude to a single educator, community leader, public servant, leader of an advocacy group, researcher/expert, or any of the countless people who have added so much value to this report. You know who you are, and I have probably thanked you personally in one way or another for your contributions ... I hope.

The ideas and coordination support I received from the Office of the Premier and Cabinet Office were invaluable to every aspect of my work.

The very capable public servants in the Ministries of Education and of Children and Youth Services provided helpful analysis and information through countless briefings, as well as organizational skill in putting together community roundtables, all above and beyond their regular onerous and important responsibilities. I also am grateful for the input I received from other ministries, including Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, Aboriginal Affairs, and Citizenship and Immigration.

Throughout this process, I received valuable insights from leading Canadian and international experts in the field of early learning, tapping their experience and knowledge.

Working groups of experts in the areas of curriculum, human resources, and research provided critically important input, as did many small groups of experts and practitioners who helped me test and refine the recommendations.

This report would not be possible without an even smaller group that spent hours upon hours with me ensuring that the best ideas of thousands of pages about what is best for children and their families could reside in a more accessible number of words.

I am deeply grateful to the Atkinson Charitable Foundation board and staff who generously created the "space" for me to work on this labour of love.

Reserving a few exceptions to the naming dilemma: I wish to acknowledge the Canadian "godfather" for recognizing the critical importance of the early years, Dr. Fraser Mustard, who has been a friend and mentor, energizing and cajoling me for the past two decades.

Finally, I am remarkably fortunate to share a life with Tassie Notar, my most constructive critic, and my very own early learning advisors: Blaise, Jesse, Tai, Muriel, Matt, BK, Indi, Jake, Picabo, and Zachary.

Recommendations

1. **The Province should create a continuum of early learning, child care, and family supports for children from the prenatal period through to adolescence, under the leadership of the Minister of Education.**
2. **The Ministry of Education should establish an Early Years Division to develop and implement an Early Years Policy Framework that will create a continuity of early learning experiences for children from 0 to 8 years of age.**
3. **The Early Years Policy Framework should mandate school boards to offer:**
   - a two-year, full-day Early Learning Program prior to Grade 1, available to all children who turn 4 by December 31. Children's participation would be by parental choice, with parents having the option of a half, full (school hours), or a fee-based extended day of programming;
   - at the request of 15 or more families in a school, a fee-based Extended Day Primary program, offering developmentally enriched programming for children from 6 to 8 years old;
   - at the request of 15 or more families in a school, fee-based after-school programming for children from 9 to 12 years old. School boards may deliver the programming directly or enlist the support of municipal parks and recreation services or community agencies;
   - extended programming that operates 50 weeks a year, including fee-based activities during school breaks and summer vacations. Daily hours of operation would be determined by school boards in response to the needs of families in their communities.
4. **The Early Years Policy Framework should also guide the transformation of programming for Ontario's youngest learners. Municipal authorities, with the necessary resources, should be mandated to plan, develop, support, and monitor an integrated network of Best Start Child and Family Centres providing families with:**
   - flexible, part-time/full-day/full-year early learning/care options for children up to age 4;
   - prenatal and postnatal information and supports;
   - parenting and family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and playgroups;
   - nutrition and nutrition counselling;
   - early identification and intervention resources;
   - links to special needs treatment and community resources, including libraries, recreation and community centres, health care, family counselling, housing, language services, and employment/training services.
5. **To support the service continuum and support children's transitions to the Early Learning Program, the preferred location for Best Start Child and Family Centres is schools. Non-school locations would be partnered with a school or family of schools.**
6. **Under the systems management of municipal authorities, the direct operation of Best Start Child and Family Centres could be provided by local or regional governments, school boards, postsecondary institutions, or non-profit agencies.**
7. **Non-profit and commercial providers may continue to operate licensed child care in accordance with current program standards. All service expansion would take place through Best Start Child and Family Centres and school boards.**
8. **The expectations set out in the Early Years Policy Framework should be operationalized through local Early Years Service Plans developed by municipal authorities in partnership with school boards and community partners. Outcomes and targets should be developed through provincial-municipal collaboration and funding flowed through municipal authorities and school boards to meet targets.**
9. **The Province should build on existing maternal and parental leave options to design a made-in-Ontario Parental Leave and Benefit Program that:**
   - provides parents with paid leave after the birth or adoption of a child for up to 400 days;
   - expands coverage to include self-employed parents;
   - provides flexibility to allow parents to extend and supplement their leave by returning to work part-time;

- provides 10 days annually of job-protected family leave for parents with children under the age of 12;
- designates six weeks for the exclusive use of the father or other non-birthing parent; if not used, this time would be deducted from the 400 days. This provision would not reduce the leave of single parents.

10. The Early Years Policy Framework should contain:

- Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) as the curriculum and pedagogical framework for Best Start Child and Family Centres, the Early Learning Program, and the Extended Day Primary program;
- the Continuum of Development in ELECT as the central tool for ongoing individual observation and documentation in programs for children from 0 to 8 years old;
- based on ELECT, guidelines for facilities and outdoor spaces, scheduling, and appropriate behaviour guidance practices to accommodate programs for children from 0 to 8 years old and their families;
- the Early Learning Program Curriculum (for 4- and 5-year-olds) as the curriculum in the Early Learning Program and adapted for use in French-language settings;
- strategies to promote the effective engagement of parents in their children's learning, with emphasis on regional and local efforts.

11. The Early Years Division at the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Aboriginal educators and organizations, should adapt ELECT to reflect Aboriginal content for use in all early childhood settings in Ontario.

12. The Early Years Policy Framework should mandate municipal authorities to:

- establish a consistent early identification protocol that incorporates the Nipissing District Developmental Screens (NDDS) and the Continuum of Development in ELECT;
- consolidate responsibility for early identification and intervention services;
- develop partnerships with public health, school boards, and specialized agencies to facilitate individualized intervention plans for children.

13. The Early Years Policy Framework should establish staffing for early learning environments as follows:

- The Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-old children should be staffed by teams of certified teachers and registered early childhood educators (ECEs). Local flexibility should be possible, but two "non-negotiable" essentials must always be included: educators skilled at applying child development knowledge and a strong and effective parent engagement strategy.
- The Extended Day Primary program for children from 6 to 8 years old should have one registered ECE for approximately 15 children.
- After-school programs should be led by staff knowledgeable about the developmental needs of children from 9 to 12 years old, and guided by current best practices in programming.
- Best Start Child and Family Centres should be staffed by registered ECEs and special needs resource teachers. Municipal authorities should establish appropriate staffing levels to meet programming needs. Day Nursery Act regulations currently governing child-staff ratios and age groupings should be reviewed and updated.

14. School boards should organize staffing to promote full-time employment for ECEs. ECEs should form a unique professional classification within school boards.

15. The Ontario College of Teachers should require all teachers who do not have early childhood knowledge to complete an early childhood Additional Qualification course (or equivalent experience) within five years in order to hold a position in the Early Learning Program.

16. To support the development of the early childhood workforce, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, in consultation with the Minister of Education, should:

- refocus ECE diploma programs on children from 0 to 8 years old;
- establish an early childhood specialty degree program focusing on children from 0 to 8 years old;
- encourage French-language postsecondary institutions to increase the number of francophone ECEs, and intervention and family support professionals;

- encourage postsecondary institutions to recruit students and education faculty reflective of the gender, race, and ethnicity needed in the early childhood workforce;
- encourage postsecondary institutions to recruit Aboriginal students to become educators in early years programs;
- require ECE diploma and early childhood specialty degree programs to apply transparent, accessible prior learning assessment and recognition processes;
- ensure that ECE apprenticeship training is aligned with the Ontario Program Standard for the ECE diploma;
- fund postsecondary programs to expand bridging programs into ECE diploma and teacher education degree programs specifically designed to fast-track people with out-of-country credentials.

17. The Early Years Division should support the development of management tools and establish a province-wide in-service training plan to assist school board and municipal managers, school principals, and centre directors in the establishment and operations of the Early Learning Program, Extended Day Primary program, and Best Start Child and Family Centres.

18. The Early Years Division should:

- build on existing information sources to develop and implement a consolidated integrated accountability mechanism, the Early Years Index, focused on the systems monitoring of inputs, measurable outcomes, and transparent public reporting. The index would include a standard program evaluation tool that links the developmental outcomes in ELECT and the operation of Best Start Child and Family Centres, Early Learning Programs, and Extended Day Primary programs;
- provide mechanisms to foster learning and expertise by promoting the exchange of best practices and staff knowledge about how outcomes are measured and how the information can be used to improve performance.

19. The Province should:

- adopt a three-year time frame, beginning in September 2010, to implement a two-year full (school) day Early Learning Program prior to Grade 1, for every child who turns 4 by December 31;
- provide sufficient funding for operations and staffing levels for the Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-olds to support the recommendations in this report;
- allocate equitably across all regions and school boards, including boards that now offer full-day learning;
- provide sufficient funding to school boards to cover occupancy and related costs for the operation of extended day/year programming for children from 4 to 12 years old;
- modify child care fee subsidy eligibility to facilitate flexible enrolment options and remove parents' work requirement for eligibility so that more children can benefit, especially the most disadvantaged children;
- maintain the current 75 per cent target for French-language elementary schools to have French-language programs for 0- to 3-year-olds by 2011–12;
- transfer to municipal authorities funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres in a single envelope that includes all existing transfers for programs/resources that will be consolidated under Best Start Child and Family Centres, resources associated with regulation and oversight, plus all child care savings generated from implementation of the Early Learning Program;
- negotiate transitional funding, as necessary, to support program reorganization through Early Years Service Plans;
- secure continued support for Best Start child care spaces now funded by the federal government;
- undertake immediate discussions with the federal government to ensure children of First Nations are not disadvantaged by the implementation of full-day learning.

20. Beginning in 2012, the Province should coordinate a process with key ministries to modernize legislation that would produce a new Education and Family Supports Act that would:

- enable the outcomes noted in this report;
- reduce redundancies;
- eliminate outdated elements in various pieces of legislation and develop a single integrated piece of legislation.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

[1] Assessments indicate that 27 per cent of children in Ontario (and a similar percentage across Canada) are vulnerable when they enter Grade 1 – they have learning, health, and behaviour problems that are likely to interfere with their academic achievement and ability to get along with others. For example, see the following:

Janus, M. (2006). Measuring community early child development. *CAP Journal*, 14 (3), 12–14.

Lloyd, J., & Hertzman, C. (2008). From EDI to FSA: Longitudinal analysis with linked population data. In J. Lloyd (Ed.), *Bringing It Together*. Ottawa, ON: Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre, Canadian Council on Learning.

Kershaw, P., Irwin, L., Trafford, K., & Hertzman, C. (2006). *The British Columbia Atlas of Child Development* (1st ed.). Vancouver, BC: Human Early Learning Partnership, University of British Columbia.

Willms, J.D. (Ed.). (2002). *Vulnerable Children*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

In some communities, the percentage of vulnerable children is much higher. Many families and communities face societal barriers (such as poverty; employment demands; transient living conditions; parental health problems; minority ethno-cultural, racial, or linguistic status; and limited time and/or resources) that make supporting their children's optimal early development difficult. While children facing these barriers are more likely to have problems, vulnerable children are present across the socio-economic spectrum.

[2] UNICEF. (2008). *The Child Care Transition, Innocenti Report Card 8, 2008*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

[3] Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Education. (2007). *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Available at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/fnmiFramework.pdf.

[4] Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (2008). *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario.

Chapter 2

[5] Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. (2007). *Early Learning for Every Child Today: Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. p. 7.

[6] McCain, M., & Mustard, F. (1999). *Early Years Study*. Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario.

[7] Canadian Council on Learning. (2007). Report on the State of Early Childhood Learning in Canada. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Council on Learning. p. 2.

[8] McKinsey and Company, Social Sector Office. (2009). *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*. New York, McKinsey and Company. p. 5.

[9] Willms (2002).

[10] For example: Leitch, K. (2008). *Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth*. Ottawa, ON: Health Canada; Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The Spirit Level*. London, UK: Allen Lane; Willms (2002).

[11] Willms (2002).

[12] Martin, R., & Florida, R. (2009). *Ontario in the Creative Age*. Toronto, ON: Martin Prosperity Institute. p. 34.

[13] McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (2008). *The Roots of Youth Violence*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer of Ontario. p. 252.

[14] Cleveland, G., & Krashinsky, M. (1998). *The Benefits and Costs of Good Childcare: The Economic Rationale for Public Investment in Young Children*. Toronto, ON: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

[15] Lefebvre, P., & Merrigan, P. (2008). Childcare policy and the labor supply of mothers: A natural experiment for Canada. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 26 (3), 519–548.

[16] Prentice, S. (2007a). *Franco-Manitoban Childcare: Childcare as Economic, Social and Language Development in St-Pierre-Jolys*. Winnipeg, MB: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba; Prentice, S. (2007b). *Northern Childcare: Childcare as Economic and Social Development in Thompson*. Winnipeg, MB: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba; Prentice, S. (2007c). *Rural Childcare: Childcare as Economic and Social Development in Parkland*. Winnipeg, MB: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba.

[17] Hart, B., & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in Everyday Parenting and Intellectual Development in Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

[18] Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, S., Belfield, C., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 40.* Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

[19] Heckman, J. (2008). The case for investing in disadvantaged young children. In First Focus (Ed.), *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in Our Nation's Future.* Washington, DC: In Focus. pp. 49–58.

[20] Barnett, W., Jung, K., Wong, V., Cook, T., & Lamy, C. (2007). *Running Ahead: Effects of Five State Pre-kindergarten Programs on Early Learning.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research; Barnett, S. (2008). *Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications.* Boulder and Tempe, AZ: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Available at http://epicpolicy.org/publication/preschool-education.

[21] For example: da Costa, J.L., & Bell, S. (2001). A Comparison of the Literacy Effects of Full Day vs. Half-day Kindergarten. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Education Research Association, Seattle; da Costa, J.L., & Bell, S. (2000). Full Day Kindergarten at an Inner City Elementary School: Perceived and Actual Effects. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Education Research Association, New Orleans; Herry, Y., Maltais, C., & Thompson, K. (2007). Effects of a full-day preschool program on 4-year-old children. *Early Childhood Research and Practice,* 9 (2). Accessed March 23, 2008, at http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v9n2/ herry.html.

[22] Butler-Jones, D. (2008). *Report of the State of Public Health in Canada.* Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada. p. 69.

Chapter 3.1

[23] While acknowledging the contribution to early childhood policy and practice made by ministries of health and social welfare, Peter Moss and John Bennett (Moss, P., & Bennett, J. [2006]. Toward a New Pedagogical Meeting Place? Bringing Early Childhood into the Education System. Briefing paper for a Nuffield Educational Seminar, September 26, 2006. Available at http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/blending.htm) gave these reasons for consolidating children's programming under education ministries:

- The primary focus of education is children.
- Contemporary education theory recognizes that children are learners from birth and promotes the importance of lifelong learning.
- Unlike welfare-based services, education offers universal access and a strong infrastructure (financing, training support, curriculum, data collection, evaluation, and research).
- Education is a publicly recognized and publicly supported system.

These internationally acclaimed researchers recently told me that their continuing work confirms that consolidation under education improves goal definition, governance, accountability, and results.

[24] The general public typically defines child care as childminding or babysitting. Governments often define child care as a service to support parents' labour force participation. The early childhood sector and other professionals define quality child care as primarily a program that offers early childhood education opportunities.

[25] From the submission of the Counties of Bruce, Grey and Huron.

Our vision of a rural model of full day early learning:
Each community would have an elementary school which would serve as a 'hub' for the community. All child care and early learning programs would be situated within the school. Staff from a variety of organizations and agencies, such as the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC), public health, preschool special needs resourcing, preschool speech and language, would utilize space appropriate for the provision of parenting programs, literacy programs, screening and assessment, early intervention, etc. Programs would be of high quality, have adequate sustainable funding and would be delivered by trained, appropriately compensated staff.

[26] Yalnizyan, A. (2007). *The Rich and the Rest of Us: The Changing Face of Canada's Growing Gap.* Toronto, ON: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Available at http://www.growinggap.ca/research.

[27] McCain, M., Mustard, F., & Shanker, S. (2007). *Early Years Study 2.* Toronto, ON: Council for Early Child Development. p. 135.

[28] Including the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, the submissions of the Community College Committee of Academic Vice-Presidents, the Toronto Multi-Site Early Learning and Care Group, the College of Family Physicians, and the Council of Early Child Development.

[29] The Best Start Child and Family Centres will provide:

- prenatal and postnatal information and support;
- home visiting;
- child and family playgroups;
- family literacy, information, and supports;
- full-time, part-time, and occasional early learning/care for children up to 4 years old;
- food and nutrition counselling programs;

- early identification and intervention resources and links to specialized treatment services;
- links to community resources such as libraries, recreation and community centres, health services, family counselling, employment training, settlement services, and housing.

[30] For example, the Hanen Program has been developed to train staff working in early childhood settings to deliver sensitive news to parents. The program helps staff empathize with parents experiencing a range of emotions as they come to an understanding that their child may need intervention for a problem.

[31] Boydell, K.M., Bullock, H., & Goering, P.N. (2009). *Getting Our Acts Together: Interagency Collaborations in Child and Youth Mental Health.* Toronto, ON: Health Systems Research and Consulting Unit: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. The report recognizes that many programs and services for children and youth with mental and emotional health challenges are disjointed and challenging for families to navigate. It suggests that, with improved integration of mental health programs, more children would be served and treatment would be more effective. The report reflects my concern that treatment services are often overly professionalized. For example, promising practices of new "train-the-trainer" approaches to supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorders should be aggressively explored. As well, too many young Deaf children are falling through the cracks because of a long-lasting and ongoing divide of opinion and evidence about "what's best". This needs to be resolved.

[32] Miller, B. (2007). *The Learning Season: The Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement.* Braintree, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Available at http://www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Learning_Season_ES.pdf.

[33] Hausmann, R., Tyson, L., & Zahida, S. (2008). *Global Gender Gap Report 2008.* Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

[34] Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development. (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care.* Paris: Directorate for Education.

[35] In Sweden, parents can share 12 months' leave, during which the parent receives 90 per cent of his or her salary. Working hours can be reduced to six per day until the child is 8 years old. Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, and Spain have paid maternity leave provisions that are superior to Canada's.

Quebec provides a made-in-Canada model. Quebec parents may choose from two options: 70 per cent of their average weekly earnings for the first 25 weeks and 55 per cent for the remaining 25 weeks, or 75 per cent of average weekly earnings for a maximum of 40 weeks. By comparison, the federal program leave provides 55 per cent earning replacement for 50 weeks. The earning threshold in Quebec is $62,000, compared with $42,300 under the federal Employment Insurance program, making maximum payments in Quebec $894 a week against the $447 ceiling under the federal plan. There is no waiting period for insurance in Quebec and eligibility is determined by minimum gross annual earnings of $2,000, allowing self-employed parents to participate.

Quebec is also the only jurisdiction in Canada that designates a period for the parent who did not give birth (five weeks). The intention is to encourage fathers to become active participants in child rearing. The Quebec plan also includes 10 days of legislated leave for family-related matters. The program has had a profound impact on the behaviour of Quebec fathers. Among eligible fathers, 56 per cent claimed benefits in 2006. The participation rate for fathers outside Quebec remained steady over the three years examined, at around 11 per cent (Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, June 23, 2008).

Quebec was able to design its parental leave program by claiming its portion of federal Employment Insurance funds. The Ontario government should consider negotiating its share of maternity/parental leave payments with the federal government, allowing Ontario to design more modern, responsive, and cost-effective leave provisions. Effective leave provisions also reduce the demand for more costly non-parental care for infants.

Chapter 3.2

[36] Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. (2007). p. 15.

[37] The use of ELECT is gaining momentum in early childhood and Kindergarten programs. The Ministry of Children and Youth is piloting ELECT at seven sites across Ontario. A final report, with recommendations for future implementation phases, is expected in July 2009. Several colleges and universities are introducing ELECT into early childhood education and teacher education programs. George Brown College is developing electronic tools and resources for observing and documenting individual learning using the Continuum of Development. These should be publicly available by spring 2010.

[38] Ministry of Education. (2006). *Kindergarten Program (revised).* Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario.

[39] Cappon, P. (2006). *National Post*, November 20, 2006.

[40] Program evaluations indicate that the health care system is an effective way to reach parents and children, and help build parent knowledge about the link between their children's

physical health and their social, emotional, and cognitive development. Most parents of infants have regular contact with their child's health care provider. These visits traditionally focus on assessing the physical health of children, ensuring that they are meeting milestones for physical growth (i.e., height and weight), and immunizing them against childhood diseases.

Eighteen months is an opportune age for a more enhanced assessment of the child and in-depth discussion with the parents. Children of this age are starting to speak, so it is possible to detect early signs of speech and language or other communication problems. They are becoming more independent and assertive, and parents may start to experience difficulties managing their children's behaviour. Importantly, it is an age at which early identification and intervention with respect to physical, behavioural, and mental health challenges or detection of environmental risks, including parental smoking, abuse, or family violence, can make a significant difference for children. The visit is well timed to reinforce among parents the importance of nutrition. Poor nutrition in toddlers can result in a lifetime of weight-related health problems.

41 Ready to Read, developed by the Toronto Public Library, is a parent-friendly approach to supporting children's emergent reading. The Learning Partnership's Welcome to Kindergarten offers parents, caregivers, and children scheduled to start Kindergarten an orientation in their neighborhood school and an activity bag. Seeds of Empathy, the younger sibling of the well-known Roots of Empathy, is designed for use in early childhood settings to foster social, emotional, and literacy competencies for 3- to 5-year-olds. TV Ontario continues to be one of the province's great resources for enhancing parent knowledge.

42 Zadeh, Z., Farnia, F., & Ungerleider, C. (2006). Low Parental Education, a Family Risk Factor: How to Close the Achievement Gap between Children with Differing Parental Education. Paper presented at the 2006 Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Ottawa, May 27, 2006.

43 Ontario Regulation 612/00 provides information pertaining to school councils and addresses the requirement for boards' consultation with school councils with respect to the development, review, and implementation of the board policy regarding the conduct of persons in schools within the board's jurisdiction.

44 Canadian Council on Learning. (2008). Improving literacy levels among Aboriginal Canadians. *Lessons in Learning*. September. Available at http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/LessonsInLearning/Sep-04-08-Improving-literacy-levels.pdf.

Chapter 3.3

45 Best Start Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources. (2007). *Investing in Quality*. Toronto, ON: Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

46 The model includes lunch, breaks, and preparation time scheduled into the work day of teachers and ECEs. Many children will be enrolled in the Early Learning Program for an extended day. Some classrooms might be open for only the school day, and children in those classrooms would join other classes for the extended day periods. The schedules of the ECEs should overlap during the children's lunch period to allow lunch breaks for the staff while maintaining a learning environment for the children.

47 **Best Start Child and Family Centre Early Childhood Team**

Early Childhood Educators	Early Childhood Resource Teachers
ECE Diploma or equivalent • Assess children's developmental progress • Plan, implement, and assess play-based learning curriculum • Provide a healthy physical, social, and emotional environment • Communicate regularly with families • Provide parenting activities • Provide coaching for family engagement	ECE Diploma and Resource Teacher Certificate OR ECE Degree • Conduct early identification screens in consultation with ECEs and families • Guide early intervention strategies to accommodate individual children and their full participation in the program • Liaise with other professionals – public health nurses, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists – as appropriate • Continue case management when children with identified special needs enter the Early Learning Program and the primary grades

48 While the principal will play a key role in successful implementation, not all principals are "naturals" when it comes to leadership of change. No one leader of any organization has all the leadership and management skills required. Some are more leaders than managers, inspiring, motivating, and identifying levers for change. Others are more managers with a firm understanding of how to ensure that "things are done right". Self-knowledge, aided by reflective practice and feedback from people familiar with the skills of the organizational head, is the key to allowing and encouraging them to complement their skills. In this case, some principals can benefit from coaching by an itinerant school-board-wide mentor on early learning, or they can assign the "change responsibilities" to others. Principals would also benefit from a "Principal Qualification Course" on early learning and development.

49 **Current Preparation and Recognition of Teachers and Early Childhood Educators**

	Teachers	Early Childhood Educators
Pre-service	Thirteen university teacher education programs. Primary-junior qualifications cover the years from ages 3 to 12, or grades JK to 6, in two divisions (Primary: JK–3; Junior 4–6)	Twenty-four Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology ECE diploma programs and six university degree programs
Professional Recognition	Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)	College of Early Childhood Educators
Course Content	The OCT accredits the pre-service education program in Ontario. Ontario Regulation 347/02 sets out the requirements that programs must meet to be accredited, including requirements related to course content. The OCT reviews accredited pre-service programs every five years. There is no requirement that pre-service course content include practice teaching in Kindergarten.	The Ontario ECE Program Standard informs program content and offers a balance of academic and practical experiences.
Delivery	A three- to five-year concurrent Bachelor or Master of Education program, or a one-year postgraduate consecutive Bachelor of Education program open to holders of a three- or four-year bachelor's degree	Two-year diploma and four-year degree programs that combine academic and practicum experiences
Annual Number of Graduates	Approximately 8,500	Approximately 2,500

[50] Lakehead University's Office of Aboriginal Initiatives facilitates a centralized cooperative approach to Aboriginal programming, external community liaison, and services to students on and off campus. The mandate of this office is to provide leadership in Aboriginal development and to advance, within the university community, an understanding of Aboriginal culture, heritage, and language through activities that heighten awareness of Aboriginal issues and identity. Lakehead University offers a number of targeted support services and academic programs for Aboriginal learners, including specific education-related programs such as the Honours Bachelor of Education Aboriginal P/J, the Native Teacher Education Program, and the Native Language Instructors Program. The Office of Aboriginal Initiatives works with the Lakehead University Aboriginal Management Council, consisting of organizations from the surrounding community, whose role is to advise the president's office.

Chapter 3.4

[51] Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Education. (2007). p. 38.

[52] Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2008). *Report of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review – Facing the Future Together.* Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer of Ontario. p. 38.

[53] The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an arm's-length agency of the Ontario government mandated to evaluate and report on the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary education in Ontario. Using student assessments, the EQAO compiles information about children's learning, which it releases to the public, along with recommendations for system improvement. The EQAO also manages Ontario's participation in national and international assessments and reports on the results. p. 39.

[54] Lloyd & Hertzman, C. (2008). p. 40.

Chapter 4

[55] The Ministry of Education does not provide space specifications. School board guidelines for both new and renovated classrooms generally include direct access to outdoor play areas, in-room or adjacent washrooms, food preparation and storage areas, a low sink accessible to children, cubbies, and equipment storage. Newly constructed Kindergarten classrooms average 1,000 square feet.

[56] Capital costs annualized over 25 years would total approximately $1.7 billion.

[57] The model reserves some classrooms for special school programming based on enrolment in the school:

- Less than 249 students in the school, 1 classroom is reserved
- From 250 to 449 students, 2 classrooms
- 450 or more students, 3 classrooms

[58] Calculations of staffing cost are based on current teacher collective agreements and average annual ECE salaries of $47,000, with benefits totalling 24 per cent.

[59] Program managers should ensure that parents are fully aware of the opportunities to recoup fees paid through the federal Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED). Analysis indicates that Ontario parents are not making full use of the CCED, which provides tax exemptions of $7,000 for children under 6 and $4,000 for children 7 to 16 years old. As well, the CCED has not been adjusted in over a decade. Its $7,000 ceiling does not address the high fees in infant and toddler care. The Province should urge the federal government to bring its tax policies in line with the actual costs of non-parental child care.

[60] Calculating Parent Fees for Extended Day/Year Programming for Children 4 to 8 Years Old
Extended day/year Early Learning Program: $6,700 annually/$27 daily
Extended day/year Extended Day Primary program, children 6 to 8: $5,200 annually/$20 daily

Family 1	With Subsidy		Without Subsidy	
One Child under 6	Two Parents	One Parent	Two Parents	One Parent
Median pre-tax wage	$55,723	$29,809	$55,723	$29,809
Cost 1 child	$6,700	$6,700	$6,700	$6,700
Income tested fee	$6,717	$981	$0	$0
Subsidy	$0	$5,719	$0	$0
Parents pay	$6,700	$981	$6,700	$6,700
CCED reimburses	$1,414	$206	$1,414	$1,474
Net parent fee	$5,303	$775	$5,303	$5,226
% of "full fee"	79%	12%	78%	78%
% of pre-tax income	9.5%	3%	9%	18%
% of net income	13.6%	3.4%	13.6%	29.0%

Family 2	With Subsidy		Without Subsidy	
Two Children: One under 6, One over 6	Two Parents	One Parent	Two Parents	One Parent
Median pre-tax wage	$55,723	$29,809	$55,723	$29,809
Cost 2 children	$11,900	$11,900	$11,900	$11,900
Income tested fee	$6,717	$981	$0	$0
Subsidy	$5,183	$10,919	$0	$0
Parents pay	$6,717	$981	$11,900	$11,900
CCED reimburses	$1,414	$206	$2,316	$2,316
Net parent fee	$5,303	$775	$9,584	$9,584
% of "full fee"	45%	7%	81%	81%
% of pre-tax income	10%	3%	17%	32%
% of net income	13.6%	3.4%	27.1%	64.5%

Note: Family incomes are based on the 2006 Census, median pre-tax family income; pre-tax incomes are used for the purpose of calculating "income tested" child care fees.

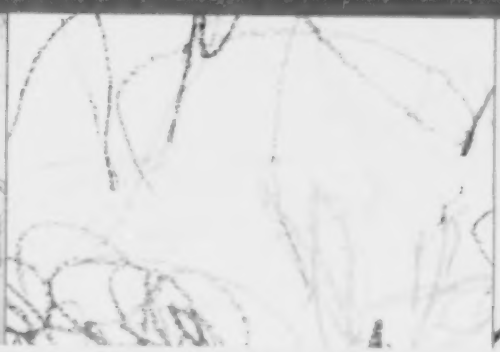
[61] Savings will come from lower fees for 4- to 8-year-olds. Fewer parents will require fee subsidies, thus freeing up subsidy funding for more disadvantaged families. Wage grants for ECEs working with children from age 4 to 12 will remain with municipal authorities. The salaries of ECEs working in schools will be covered by school boards.

Chapter 5

[62] Fullan, M. (2008). *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive.* Chicago, IL: John Wiley & Sons. p. 74.

The Continuum of Development →→→

18 months →→→

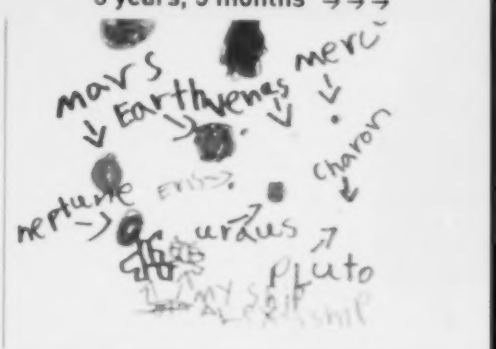


24 months →→→

3 years, 5 months →→→

4 years →→→

5 years, 9 months →→→



5 years, 10 months →→→

6 years →→→

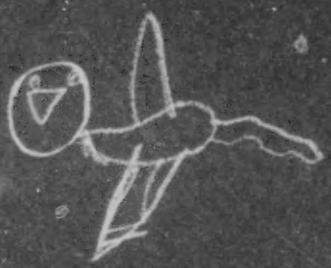
7 years →→→

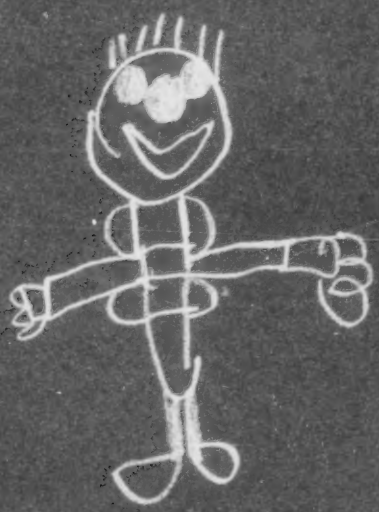
8 years →→→

During early childhood, abilities to represent feelings, intentions, and actions in words, to pretend play, to draw and to construct with blocks emerge. Children begin to build bridges between ideas and to connect feelings, facts, and new understandings. If properly supported in early childhood, children enter Grade 1 eager to learn the cultural tools essential to our society – literacy, numeracy, and inquiry skills. Children's drawings reveal much about this developmental continuum. By 18 months children are coordinating senses and motor skills in increasingly complex ways, moving from discrete marks to continuous scribbling. By age 3 they are including lines and shapes and making attempts at story telling and often pretending to make letters and words. Between ages 5 and 6 children use their art to express new vocabulary and represent topics of interest. In the early grades children pay increasing attention to detail. Attempts to represent perspective, depth, and position are evident.

Thank you to the students and teachers from schools across Ontario who graciously provided artwork for this project.

www.ontario.ca/earlylearning





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